

DISCOURSES
ON
PERSONAL RELIGION.
IN
TWO VOLUMES.

By SAMUEL STENNETT, D.D.

VOLUME I.

Τί θέλετε; λογικῶν ψυχᾶς ἔχειν, ή ἀλόγων; λογικῶν τίνων λογικῶν; ὑγιῶν ή φαύλων; ὑγιῶν. τί δὴ ζητεῖτε;

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M.DCC.LXIX.

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The CHURCH of CHRIST

in Littlefield-Ward-Exley

Fincornes-Inn-Bridges

My dear Friends

TH E imminent separation which
will now for many years
separate you and me will
not allow me to desist from the
following glorious functions per-
formed. And though I mean not
to

TO
THE CHURCH OF CHRIST
MEETING
In LITTLE WILD-STREET
LINCOLNS-INN-FIELDS.

My dear Friends,

THE intimate relation which hath now for many years subsisted between you and me, will not allow me to doubt to whom the following discourses should be inscribed. And, though I meant not

iv DEDICATION.

by this address to make you accountable for their many defects, yet I am happy in thus venturing them into public view through your hands, as it gives me an opportunity of expressing the sense I have of your candor and affection towards me, and the concern I feel for your best interests.

I THE subject, you are sensible, is infinitely momentous; though alas! strangely misunderstood by some, despised by others, and neglected by most. I cannot doubt therefore but this attempt, in a dependance upon the divine blessing, to explain the nature and establish the authority of real religion, to awaken the attention and conciliate the regards of men to it, and to assist the Christian

DEDICATION.

v

in the experience and practice of it,
will meet with a favourable recep-
tion, my Friends, from you.

FOR the connection of the dis-
courses I refer you to the contents,
or rather to the close of the second
volume, where you will find a brief
recapitulation of the whole.

I HAVE only to add, that as I
trust you have already received some
benefit from the delivery of these
sermons in public (a reflection which
gives me no small pleasure); so
I am not without hopes that they
may afford you some farther profit
and entertainment in your families
and closets. To which ends I af-
sure myself of the cheerful concur-
rence

vi DEDICATION.

rence of your fervent prayers to God
with those of

Your most affectionate Friend,

and Servant,

in the gospel of Christ,

Hatton-Garden,
Oct. 30, 1769.

Samuel Stennett.

The Reader is desired to correct the following
mistakes of the press with his pen.

Vol. I. p. 11. for confined read confused

— P. 350. for advantitious read adventitious

Vol. II. p. 63. for reigns read reigns

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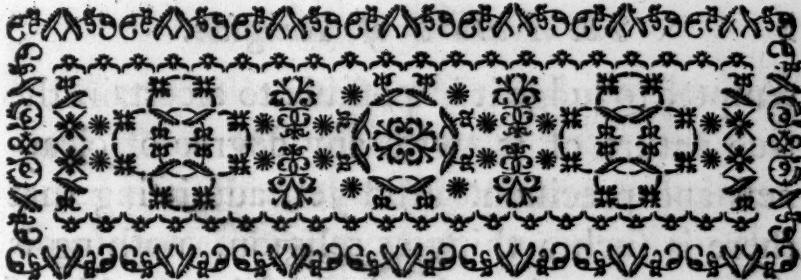
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DISCOURSE I.

The Nature of Religion.

P A R T I.

I COR. iv. 20.

— *The kingdom of God is not in word,
but in power.*

WHEREIN religion consists is an inquiry which hath justly challenged the attention of mankind, in every age and in every part of the world. But so various are the opinions which have obtained upon this important subject, that he who hath not entered into the spirit of the thing itself, would be almost

2 *The Nature of Religion.*

tempted to judge it impossible to ascertain the true nature of it, with any degree of clearness and precision. And yet, admitting that there is such a thing as religion, nothing is more evident than that it must be capable of a full and clear description. And whatever difficulties may be supposed to attend the explanation of this point, yet if men would but soberly listen to the dictates of reason, together with the concurrent testimony of scripture and experience, they would not find it so hard a task as they imagine, to acquire at least some general notions about it. What I propose therefore in this discourse is, to give you a brief description of what I apprehend to be the true nature of religion. And whether we are, or are not ourselves interested in this divine blessing ; yet I persuade myself this account of it will so far approve itself to the judgment and consciences of men, as to oblige them to acknowledge, that it is an object most deserving of their attention. This description then I shall ground on the passage now before us, which at once partakes of all the beauty and variety of a most expressive figure, and of all the strength and perspicuity of the plainest language. *The kingdom of God is not in word, but in power.*

The

The apostle, you will find by looking back a few verses before the text, had proposed himself to the Corinthians as their example, offering it both as an excuse for this freedom, and as an argument to conciliate their regards, that he was their father, *having in Christ Jesus begotten them through the gospel.* And lest in his absence the lively impression which his doctrine and manner of life had made upon their hearts, should in any degree be erased, he tells them, he had sent Timothy to remind them of his ways in Christ. But they were not from hence to conclude, as some of their false teachers had insinuated, that he did not design himself to come among them. For says he in the verse preceding the text, *I will come unto you shortly, if the Lord will.* And he adds, *I will know, not the speech of them which are puffed up, but the power.* “ I will judge of the pretensions of these new apostles, not by their words, their confident talk, or their insinuating manner of address ; but by the power, the miraculous proofs they have to bring in vindication of their mission. For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power. The Christian dispensation owes its existence and sup-

“ port, not to human wit and eloquence,
“ but to the exertion of divine power and
“ grace.”

But as the spirit and tendency of any one's doctrine, as well as the miraculous powers he may claim, is a very just and natural criterion, by which to judge of the pretensions of him who publishes it ; so I see no reason why this may not be included in the passage before us. And then the text, without offering any violence to it, may be understood, not only as expressive of the extraordinary means by which the Christian dispensation was first introduced and established, but as descriptive of the nature and tendency of the Christian doctrine itself. The gospel, if received in truth and love, produces effects which are substantial and important. A new *kingdom* is set up in the heart of the real Christian. And that kingdom is not in *word*, it consists not in mere notions, forms or appearances ; but in *power*, in the commanding influence of the great principles of religion on our tempers and lives. Our Saviour to this purpose admonishes us, to *seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness*^a. And the apostle himself elsewhere affirms, that *the kingdom of God*

^a Matth. vi. 33.

is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost ^b.

Now, before I proceed to consider this figurative description of religion, it will be necessary to give you some general explanation of the term itself. And you hardly need be told, it is variously used, though it always conveys an idea of those concerns, which more immediately relate to God and the soul.

It is often you know put objectively for the principles we profess, or for that particular form of worship to which we are attached; so we frequently speak of the Christian and the Pagan, the Popish and the Reformed Religion. But in these discourses I shall consider it subjectively, and that chiefly in respect to the heart of man, which is its proper residence, and from whence proceed the natural and genuine effects of it in the life. Now in this view of it, it comprehends all those exercises of the mind, by which we are first led into an acquaintance with God, and are afterwards gradually formed for the enjoyment of the heavenly blessedness. In short, it is no other than the regards due from the creature to him

^b Rom. xiv. 17.

6 *The Nature of Religion.*

who made him, and which must have their origin in the heart, that being the noblest part, and the spring of all human actions. And if it be farther inquired what these regards are, it is easy to see that they must be determined by the spiritual and perfect nature of that Being, who is the great object of religion ; and by the particular capacities and circumstances of those, who are the subjects of it. God is a spirit, possessed of every possible perfection, and the constant source of all the good which creatures enjoy. Religion therefore must be a spiritual thing, consisting in the contemplation of God, a due reverence for him, an intire confidence in him, a supreme love of him, and a cordial subjection of mind to his whole will. This must be the nature of it, with regard to all intelligent creatures, whatever be the rank they hold in the scale of Beings, and whatever the capacities they are endowed with. This is the religion both of angels and of men. But then it is evident, since man is in a fallen state, that his religion must differ, and that in some very important points of it, from the religion of pure and innocent creatures. He must be recovered, at least in some degree, from the blindness, stupidity and misery in which sin

hath plunged him, before he can exercise those spiritual affections towards God which were just mentioned. His heart must be formed into a subjection to that wise and gracious scheme, which heaven hath appointed for the redemption and salvation of sinners; which subjection will express itself by an ingenuous sorrow for sin, and a humble confidence in the divine mercy. And since it is by degrees the good man grows up from his first implantation in the church of Christ, to the likeness of the blessed God, he must to this end, pass through various exercises of mind, to all which both the dispensations of providence, and the means of grace do, under a divine influence, very happily and largely contribute; till at length religion thus begun on earth is consummated in eternal glory above.

From this general view then of religion let us now proceed to a more particular consideration of the animated description given us of it in the text.

I. It is *the kingdom of God*; a kingdom which he hath erected in the hearts of men. And,

II. It consists *not in word, but in power.* It is not a mere imagination or empty sound, but a substantial and important reality.

I. It is *the kingdom of God*, a state, polity or dominion which he hath set up in the soul of man. So that I am here naturally led to speak of the sovereign of this kingdom, the subjects of it, the statutes and laws by which ~~it~~ is governed, the strength order and beauty of it, the privileges and immunities with which it is endowed, and in one word, its stability and duration.

i. Of this kingdom God is the sovereign. He hath laid the foundations of it, and he therefore of right presides over it, commanding a ready obedience to his will, taking effectual care of its real interests, and administering all its affairs with infinite wisdom and goodness. To him religion, in all the various and different expressions of it, pays its humble and dutiful homage. By him only its sacred dictates are to be guided, and to him alone it is accountable for all matters both of faith and practice. Nor is there any one holy and devout affection of the mind but rises into existence, and grows and increases there, through that authority which he holds over the human heart. An authority the more pleasing to a good man, as he sees it exercised by the just and mild administration of the Lord Jesus Christ. For God hath not only set him king over his

holy hill of Zion, his church in general ; but hath appointed him the throne in the heart of every believer in particular. And then,

2. As the heart is the place where he hath erected his throne, so the powers of it, the understanding, will and affections, are the proper subjects over which he sways his scepter. These, while men remain strangers to religion, are in a state of anarchy and confusion, like a people who have no head to govern them, and are torn to pieces with civil discords and contentions among themselves. They are alienated from God their only lawful sovereign, and at continual war with one another. But when the empire of religion is restored to the soul, all the various powers and passions of it flock in to the standard which is set up there, and joyfully submit to its authority. The understanding, before overpowered with ignorance, doubt and scepticism, is captivated to the obedience of faith. The conscience, once blind and stupid, is struck with the excellence and importance of divine things. The will, ere this fully bent on vanity and sin, is strongly inclined to holiness and goodness. And the affections, which were wretchedly bewildered in a fruitless pursuit of happiness among the creatures of sense, are now united under the

banner

banner of enlightened reason, and directed to God as their chief good. Nor need we,

3. Be at any loss to determine what are the means or instruments, by which the soul of man, thus restored to the dominion of its rightful sovereign, is ruled and governed. Whilst it remained in its former state, it had no other law to which it chose to submit, but its own depraved inclinations. Reason and conscience might indeed sometimes interpose their authority; but alas! their dictates, like the remonstrances of good old Eli to his children, were weak and feeble, and scarcely ever heard and obeyed. But now, these antient vicegerents of heaven resume their original power, and at once assisted by the superior light of divine revelation, and invested with the mighty energy of divine grace, command obedience to their precepts. By the sacred scriptures the man of religion would have his opinions, affections and conduct directed, governed and tried. To this the statute-law of God he brings his heart and his life, daily comparing himself with it, and judging himself by it. For these the venerable records of heaven, fully satisfied of their authority, he maintains a sacred reverence: and from a genuine principle of true loyalty to his sovereign, he labours

labours to conform to them, not wishing to be released from their commanding influence. And to this cheerful obedience, though alas ! disgraced with many weaknesses and imperfections, he is sweetly allured and powerfully urged by the generous motives the blessed gospel suggests ; motives arising from the unparalleled love of the Son of God himself, in laying down his life, to restore the honors of his broken law, and to vindicate the rights of his injured government. From hence likewise,

4. We are led to contemplate the beauty, order and harmony of this spiritual kingdom, which is another idea the metaphor naturally conveys. Sin, as hath been already observed, introduces into the soul of man the most horrid anarchy and confusion. It raises a civil war there, and sets all the powers of the heart at variance, not with God only, but with one another. And in these sad circumstances what a miserable appearance does the mind of man make ! How is its beauty defaced ! its strength enervated ! and its real happiness spoiled and destroyed ! But when God sets up his kingdom there, when real religion takes possession of the heart, the face of things is in some good degree altered. This little state, torn to pieces

pieces by intestine broils, angry passions, and furious lusts, emerges out of that disgrace and misery, in which it was involved, collects somewhat of its former strength, and rises gradually into a fair and flourishing empire : as the soul itself becomes again subject to the dominion of heaven, so the several powers of it, no longer restlessly invading each other's province, retire to their proper stations. Reason guides the judgment, the judgment rules the will, the will commands the affections, and the affections of the mind, under the united conduct of the judgment and the will, restrain and regulate the inferior appetites of nature. And thus order succeeds confusion, and with it that beauty, firmness and union, which were originally the glory of the human soul.

But by all this it is not meant, that religion at once exalts a man to a state of perfection. No ; the kingdom of God is as yet in its infancy, and of consequence we see it struggling even in the best of men with many difficulties and dangers. There are still Canaanites in the land, remains of ignorance, passion and sin, which will prove the unhappy occasions of disquietude and contention, if not in some instances of a kind of mutiny and rebellion. But nevertheless

vertheless it must be acknowledged, that in proportion to the influence of religion on the heart, so is the beauty health and vigor of the mind. These are the natural and genuine fruits of a true knowledge of Christ and his grace, and of a lively experience of real and substantial piety. Hereby the man is invigorated and strengthened, united to God and himself, and possessed of a dignity which will command reverence from even wicked men themselves. And if such be the nature and tendency of religion, how great may we reasonably suppose,

5. Are the privileges and immunities annexed to this spiritual kingdom ! God himself, as you have seen, is both the Founder and the Sovereign of it : and since it receives its denomination and existence from him, there can be no just doubt but he will honour it with his peculiar favor, presence and protection. If it be a happiness as to our outward concerns to live under the wise, just and mild administration of a worldly prince ; to have our liberties and properties preserved intire ; to be sure of the speedy and effectual redress of our grievances ; and, together with peace and plenty, to possess a rich supply of every needful and desirable good ; how great
must

must be the felicity of the Christian who is intitled to these spiritual blessings in a much higher and nobler perfection ! God his king reigns in truth and righteousness, in gentleness and love : and as the humble heart is the willing subject of his government, so he deigns to make it the seat of his residence. There, where he hath set up the trophies of his victorious power, he descends to display the charms of his beauty and grace. *I will dwell in them*, says he, *and I will walk in them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people*^c. They are the men whom he delights to honour. To him they are allowed on every occasion to have access with boldness : and whilst he graciously smiles upon them, he assures them, with a generosity peculiar to himself, that he will supply all their wants according to his riches in glory by Jesus Christ. His perfections are each of them interested in their behalf ; his providence and grace are constantly employed to promote their real welfare ; and no good thing, which either his wisdom judges fit for them, or his bounty inclines him to bestow on them, will he ever with-hold. To all which I have only to add one circumstance more, to com-

^c 2 Cor. vi. 16.

plete

plete our idea of this spiritual kingdom; and that is,

6. And lastly, Its stability and duration. It is a kingdom that shall not be moved. The foundation of it is laid in the purpose and grace of him, who wants neither means nor inclination to support and defend it. Having raised up to himself this new empire out of the ruins of human apostacy, whilst he hath taken the administration of its affairs into his own hands, he hath descended solemnly to swear, and that by two immutable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Thus dignified then above the favorites of the most powerful monarch on earth, it is the peculiar felicity of the good man, that he holds his liberties and possessions, not on the precarious tenure of all human things, but on the faithfulness of a God, who hath made with him a covenant ordered in all things and sure.

DISCOURSE

DISCOURSE I.

PART II.

FROM this figurative description of religion, we now come to consider what is more particularly and plainly affirmed concerning it in the text :

II. *It is not in word, but in power.*
 It is not *in word*; it does not consist in notions, professions, or external forms, things wherein men are too apt to place the essence of it: but *in power*; it is an inward spiritual vital principle, which takes hold of the heart, and diffuses its influence through the life. So the text is expounded by a similar passage: *the kingdom of God is not meat and drink*, it does not consist in outward observances; *but it is righteousness, and peace, and joy in the holy Ghost*^a. These

^a Rom. xiv. 17.

are

These are the very essence of it, and constitute its true and proper nature. To the like purpose the same inspired writer thus expresses himself in another place : *He is not a Jew, who is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh : but he is a Jew, who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter, whose praise is not of men, but of God.*

Here therefore, agreeably to the order observed in the text, it will be natural to inquire a little more particularly,

FIRST, What religion is not ; and,

SECONDLY, What it really is, or wherein the true nature of it does consist.

FIRST, As to the negative part of the question, what religion is not ; it is lamentable to reflect how much the degeneracy of mankind hath contributed to our enlargement on this head. One would indeed at first view be ready to imagine, that a general contemplation of the spiritual nature of God, and of the proper use of their own intellectual powers, should be sufficient to secure men's understandings, however deprav-

* Rom. ii. 28, 29.

ed their dispositions might be, from any very great absurdities here. But alas! what absurdities can imagination devise, which have not assumed the venerable name of religion, and under that denomination claimed the serious attention of mankind? To enter particularly into them would be almost an endless task. We must not however wholly pass them over in silence. But in the mean while it will be of considerable use to help us through this maze, if we take the pains to look for a moment into those principles of the human heart, which have the main influence, though perhaps without being observed, in forming the various religious sentiments which commonly obtain.

Mankind are in an apostate state: and there are few so stupid, as not to be sensible that something is necessary to recommend them to the Deity. Now, *pride* and *self-indulgence* being the two prevailing corruptions of the heart, that scheme of religion will be most acceptable to the generality, which while it flatters the one, can be made tolerably well to consist with the other. And since the judgment is often considerably influenced by the will, it is not to be wondered that men by degrees come to think

think those opinions true, which exactly correspond with the very spirit of their depraved nature, though they are found, when stript of this recommendation, to be most absurd and ridiculous. The common herd of mankind will greedily swallow down a religion, which is made thus palatable to their taste, without troubling themselves to consider one moment about it, whether it be a reasonable service. And as to those who cannot so easily submit their understandings to a glaring imposition ; being nevertheless as strongly impelled by the same corrupt passions, they will have recourse to innumerable refinements, to gild over their fond conceits with the pleasing appearance of truth. Upon these principles then, we are enabled to account for that almost infinite variety of mistaken notions, which prevail in the world. To *pride* and *lloth*, thus either triumphing over the understanding, or else insensibly blinding it, they owe their intire origin and support ; and these depraved tempers are the grand characteristics of them all. Now by the help of this clue, we shall soon find our way through that labyrinth of error and deception which is before us, and discover what the apostle means

by that religion, which he emphatically describes as consisting *in word only*.

Under this denomination then is to be reduced, in the first place, the religion of the Pagan world, which consisted in the observance of certain rites instituted by their priests and lawgivers, with little or no foundation in reason or common sense. Their beasts we see them leading with great solemnity to their temples, and there, amidst a croud of unmeaning ceremonies, offering them on their altars, to appease the wrath of the Deity, and intitle themselves to his favor. Some we see sacrificing this animal, and others that ; some bowing to a calf ; and others, more devout than the rest, not sparing their very children from the flames. History will acquaint us with the different forms which obtained among them : but though they were so various, and passed under so many changes ; yet they were all expressive of the same temper, and were all adapted to the same ends. To merit the divine regards was the grand point they aimed at ; so gratifying their pride, while by a kind of commutation for their vices, they enabled themselves to sin with the less uneasiness and remorse.

As

As to the Jews, in the next place, it is acknowledged that the external part of their religion, like that of the Pagans, was very shewy and expensive ; though with this material difference, that it was the appointment of heaven, and founded in the truest reason, since the whole of it was figurative of the sublimest truths, and prophetic of the most interesting events. But mistaking the shadow for the substance, they unhappily laid an undue stress upon these outward observances, making real religion consist in an exact conformity to them, even while they were expressly cautioned against such an abuse of it. So that they fell into the like absurd manner of reasoning with the Heathens, just mentioned, having only this advantage above them, that while they gratified the same passions of *pride* and *self-indulgence* as their neighbors did, they could plead the divine authority for those religious forms, behind which they all the while sheltered themselves. They boasted of the kingdom of God as consisting in *meats and drinks*, not at all perceiving the spiritual intent of these positive institutions, and wholly neglecting *the weightier matters of the law*, such as *judgment, mercy and faith*^f.

^f Matth. xxiii. 23.

The Papists, again, a set of people which have risen up in the room of Pagans and Jews, have proceeded uniformly on the same principles with these their predecessors. The divine authority of the scriptures they have pressed into the service of depraved reason; and have given full scope to the favorite passions of human nature, by moulding Christianity into an entire consistency with them. Assuming to themselves the sole right of explaining the sacred records, they have insolently dictated to men the terms, on which they are to be accepted of God. And these they have taken care to settle in such a manner, as effectually to flatter the *pride* and indulge the *loth* of carnal minds, and at the same time secure to their church every kind of temporal emolument, which their unbounded avarice could wish to obtain. To these ends they have established the doctrine of merit in the strongest terms. And not content with maintaining that good works are meritorious, they have in effect taught men thus to conceive of their bad works likewise. And so, by an art peculiar to themselves, they have turned vice into virtue, and made men gainers by sinning. Such is the very genius of their religion;

and

and how it hath operated to produce the most fatal effects to society in general, and to individuals in particular, the history of many ages hath fully and largely shewn.

But, from them let us now turn our eyes to Protestants, and those especially of our own country, who enjoy the free use of their bibles, and have been instructed into better principles. Here then we may reasonably expect juster notions of things. And true it is, we do speak with abhorrence of those fetters of ignorance and superstition, with which Paganism and Popery have bound the consciences of men. We do stand astonished at the follies and absurdities which have so generally prevailed, and can hardly forbear mingling contempt with all the pity we feel for the wretched multitude, who are stupid enough to suspend their immortal interests on forms and pretences of so absurd and ridiculous a nature. But alas ! were the hearts of the generality among us to be searched to the bottom, I fear we should find their real practical notions of religion, to be as inconsistent with the dictates of right reason and of the word of God, as any of those notions are, which we have been describing. For what, on the one hand, is their religion better than *word*

only, who confine their idea of it to a servile and superficial observance of the common rules of morality, without any regard to those divine and evangelical principles, which can alone soften the heart, and mould it into a cheerful subjection to the will of God ? And on the other hand, what fitter term than this can be used to denominate the pretended religion of such, who, while they confidently boast of their clear views of the gospel, and their deep understanding in the sublime mysteries of it, neither feel the efficacy of it on their hearts to renew their perverse and wanton tempers, nor shew forth any of the admirable fruits of it in their lives ?

1. As to the former. The duties of morality, it is acknowledged, are substantial and important realities. The interests of society depend upon a due attention to them, and they cannot with too much earnestness be pressed upon mankind. But if the essence of religion be placed in the bare performance of these duties, without any regard to the principles whence they flow, which it is to be feared is the sad case with many ; it will be no difficult matter to prove, that what thus assumes the venerable name of religion, is in this point of view,

view, not only a vain and empty thing, but little better than a gross impiety. All actions must proceed from some principles, whether we do or do not ourselves regard them. These principles are known to God, and from thence the conduct of men will take its denomination as either good or bad. Now, what in the divine account is that sobriety, honesty, good nature, or even devotion itself, which ariseth not from a just sense of the real intrinsic excellence of true holiness, or from any generous sentiment of gratitude and love, but merely from a servile fear of incurring the wrath of God, or, which is worse, from a base expectation of meriting the rewards of heaven thereby? Surely such a religion, to say the best of it, is but an empty sound. There is nothing substantial or animating in it; nor are there any considerations to hold men to the performance of the several duties of it, but such as are of the most precarious and uncertain influence.

But this is not all: it is as impious, we may add, as it is vain. For what are men doing, all the while they are thus exalting morality into the seat of religion? They are treating God as they would a fellow-creature, who can look no farther than to outward

outward appearances ; and under the notion of rendering a dutiful obedience to his commands, they are gratifying in a very high degree both their *pride* and their *loth*. The one they flatter, by offering incense to this wretched obedience, of which they so much boast as their Saviour, to the intire neglect, if not contempt of Christ and his grace. And the other they soothe, by placing a few external actions in the room of the more difficult and important duties of restraining and subduing the corrupt affections of the heart. Nay we may carry the matter still farther, and affirm, that even his notions of religion are mistaken, who, while he rightly considers the government of the passions as the grand object of it, nevertheless sets about this work on false principles, vainly presuming that he can of himself make a sacrifice of his depraved affections to God, and insolently expecting that when he hath so done, he shall have a just claim upon him for his favor. Such a temper stands directly opposed to the genuine spirit of evangelical piety ; and a little reflection would convince men, that while it pretends to religion, it absolutely defeats its own pretences. For in this case, here is a slender restraint laid on one passion, merely

merely with a view to gratify another. That therefore can never be real religion, which hath only the external duties of morality, or even of devotion for its object; nor that either, which though it may extend in some sort to the affections of the mind, yet hath no other principle to put vigor and efficacy into it, except the dread of incurring the wrath of God, or the vanity of meriting his favor. But while we are thus attempting to rescue the injured rights of religion out of their hands, who would reduce it to the standard of mere morality, how are we instantly seconded, or rather prevented in the attempt, by the furious and licentious zeal of those,

2. Who run their notions into the quite opposite extreme! “True,” says the man of this character, enjoying an intire satisfaction in his own superior discernment, “a legal spirit is a diabolical spirit. Far be the very shadow of it from me! No—religion consists in none of these things. It is such a clear apprehension, and such an unshaken belief of the sublime truths of the gospel, as at once sets the mind free from all the shackles of slavish doubts and fears, raises it above the drudgery of duties, puts an end to the fruitless labor

“of

“ of keeping the heart, and, while it takes
“ the attention wholly off from itself, so
“ fixes it upon Christ, as to relieve it of all
“ dull anxiety about inward holiness and
“ personal obedience.” And thus, having dis-
covered the grand secret how to compose his
conscience, amidst the violent fever of inward
lusts, if not the open indulgence of vice,
he looks down with a contemptuous sneer
on those who are lamenting the remainders
of indwelling sin, and humbly aiming at a
conformity to the divine likeness, as a com-
pany of weak and deluded persons, if not
artful and designing hypocrites.

But if this be religion, it may be truly
said of it, that it is in *word* only. It is li-
terally speaking, a vain and empty sound ; of
no other use than to puff up the heart with
pride, and to lay the conscience gently asleep
in sin. Nay it carries, upon the very face
of it, the evident marks both of absurdity
and impiety. It is indeed true that a legal
slavish temper of mind is very unsuitable to
the free, generous and animating spirit of
the gospel. It disgraces that glorious scheme
of salvation, which abhors the least approach
to the doctrine of merit, and which so over-
powers the humble Christian with the riches
of divine grace, as to oblige him to treat

his best attainments with the utmost contempt in the sight of an infinitely holy God. Christ is all in all ; his propitiation is the only ground of a sinner's hope towards God; *in him the beloved we are accepted^s ; and by his obedience we are made righteous^t.*

But if our regards to him are to be considered in no other view, than as a means thus to relieve us of our fears, and to make us easy and secure ; the grand business of religion is overlooked, yea I may add, the main intent of it is defeated. For if there be such a thing, it stands to reason that the principal object of it must be, to recover men from their apostacy, wherein consists their misery. But what are such persons the better, yea how much are they the worse, for a knowledge which teaches them to break the bands of duty and conscience, and for a faith which enables them, amidst all their affected expressions of humility, to riot in pride and wantonness ? Nay they are guilty, so deceitful is the human heart ! of the very same thing they condemn in those of the opposite character, that is, of secretly building their hopes on themselves, instead of Christ. For while the others lay the whole

^s Eph. i. 6.

^t Rom. v. 19.

stress of their everlasting interests on their external reformation, or their zealous attachment to forms, or some slight restraint of their more furious passions ; these lay the same stress, though perhaps unperceived by themselves, on the clearness of their notions, and the imagined steadiness of their faith.

Thus have we seen then wherein consists the religion, which our text tells us, is in *word* only. And however it may be differently modified, and assume various other appearances besides those which have been mentioned ; yet the leading principles of it are every where the same : and by a diligent observation of them, the imposture, though it be artfully concealed, may I think be easily detected.

DISCOURSE

DISCOURSE I.

PART III.

HAVING thus shewn what religion is not, it remains that we now inquire,

SECONDLY, What it is, or wherein it does consist. And the inference is so natural from what hath been already observed, that we need be the less particular here. It is *in power*; a term very fitly opposed to *word*, as it is expressive of all that vigor and intenseness of mind, which distinguishes the religion of the heart from the mere notions of the head, and from the unanimated obedience of the life. As the one may not improperly be compared to the lifeless corpse, which, in his discourse of the resurrection the apostle says, is sown *in weakness*; so the other bears a resemblance, at least in some degree, to the

spiritual

spiritual body, which, adds he, using the same word as in the text, is raised *in power*¹. There is a strength, force and vital energy in real religion, which as much exceeds any false pretence to it, as the original does the picture. The one is the life itself, the other only the faint copy.

But whilst the expression in the text naturally leads us to conceive of it in the most lively and animated point of view, it by no means countenances the wild and dangerous conceits of enthusiastic minds. Conceits which form a species of religion somewhat different from either of those just mentioned; though with reason excused a place among them, since the madness of it would not allow us to describe it, as a deliberate sentiment of the mind. The understanding hath little to do here: for while men of this unhappy cast place the whole of their devotion in sudden impulses, extatic visions, and other wild reveries of a heated imagination; they do not leave themselves possessed of any certain principles, upon which they can at all be reasoned with. And yet in order to secure some appearance of truth on the side of their delusions, they

¹ Cor. xv. 43. ἐν δυνάμει.

carefully

carefully select from the scriptures some such phrases as those in our text, which they persuade themselves, do fully authorize them. But, while the Bible treats largely of the mighty power of God exerted on the hearts of them who believe, and of the influence of the blessed spirit to enlighten, quicken and comfort good men in the course of duty and suffering ; it is sufficiently evident that these doctrines, which the Christian with thankfulness receives, as some of the most glorious discoveries of the grace of God, are words as well of soberness as of truth and certainty. No such power is exerted as subverts the original constitution of our natures, and having deprived men of their reason, leaves them under the wretched infatuation of a deluded fancy and inflamed passions.

And yet, of religion it may be truly said, in respect both of its divine origin, and of its substantial nature, that it is *in power*. How it owes its increase and continuance to the mighty power of God, we may have occasion to consider more particularly hereafter : at present our concern is alone with the nature of it. It may then in general be described, as a principle of divine and spiritual life : a phrase this I the rather chuse, as it seems the fitteſt

to convey the sense of the text. It is the *vis vitæ*, the spring of life and action. Its nature, like all first principles, is simple; though it expresses itself in various ways, and can only be intelligibly explained by its operation and effects. As therefore, when we speak of a principle of honesty in any man, we mean such a sentiment of truth and uprightness, as being fixed and established in his heart, regularly influences his conduct; so of a principle of religion, it is such a perception or faith of the grand truths of it, as being deeply rooted in the mind, produces correspondent fruits in the temper and life. This surely is what is meant by the general terms of the knowledge and fear of the Lord, in the Old Testament; and by those of faith, hope, love and the grace of God, in the New.

To learn then wherein religion consists, we need only contemplate the influence of this principle on the several powers of the mind, and of consequence on the external conduct. If it be considered in reference to the understanding, it expresses itself in our perceptions, reasonings and reflections about spiritual objects; if in regard to the conscience, in a lively impression of the truth and importance of divine things; if as respecting

specting the judgment, in an approbation of the things which are excellent ; if the will, in a concurrence with whatever appears to be the pleasure of God ; and in one word, if it be considered in reference to the affections, it consists in the direction of them to their proper objects. The result of all which will be such a course of behaviour, as is in the general answerable to this state of the mind. Now this view of religion, you easily see, affords an almost infinite variety of matter for description : for as is the quality of those objects which present themselves to the mind, so will be the dispositions and affections of the heart towards them. By tracing, however, in a few words, the operations of the mind, in respect of the principal objects of religion, we shall collect some idea of what is the proper character of the real Christian.

1. Is the blessed God the object of his contemplation ? apprehending him present, he falls down before him, struck with solemn, but pleasing sentiments of his greatness and glory, and filled with a cheerful but venerable idea of his goodness and mercy. Incircled in his full orb of perfections he chuses to behold him, mingling the awful splendors of his justice and holiness, with

the softer rays of his tender compassion and love. So the God appears in the face of the man Christ Jesus ; and thus viewing him the Christian fears, hopes and loves. *O God, how excellent is thy name in all the earth ! Thou hast set thy glory above the heavens^k.* *Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne : mercy and truth go before thy face^l.* Thee will I dread — thee will I adore — in thee will I trust. *Whom have I in heaven but thee ? There is none upon earth that I desire besides thee^m.*

2. Are his eyes turned inward on himself ? The scene just beheld is now awfully reversed. Instead of greatness, purity and perfection, he beholds frailty, guilt and misery. Conscious he is indeed of an immortal nature capable of the likeness and fruition of God, but as conscious that it is in fallen, ruined and wretched circumstances. With a passionate exclamation therefore, the natural fruit of such a conviction, he cries out, *Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful manⁿ.* But recovering himself, he adds, *Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean^o.* So, oppressed with grief, he deplores his manifold sins ; covered with

^k Ps. viii. 1.

^l Ps. lxxxix. 14.

^m Ps. lxxiii. 25.

ⁿ Luke v. 8.

^o Matth. viii. 2.

shame,

shame, he bewails the sad degeneracy of his heart ; and for ever despairing of salvation in himself, he renounces all confidence in his own merit or strength.

3. Is the blessed Jesus presented to the view of his faith ? His hope, desire and gratitude kindle at the sight. With pleasure he contemplates the person, character, sacrifice and righteousness of the Son of God. Thankfully he receives this provision of the divine mercy for the most unworthy, firmly he relies on it ; and thence alone derives his hope of being acquitted and accepted before God. To his instructions as the great Prophet of the Church, allured with that divine wisdom and grace which is poured into his lips, he readily listens. In his mediation as the great High-priest of the Church, encouraged by his faithfulness and compassion, he humbly confides. And at the foot of his throne as the great King of the Church, struck with the majesty and mildness of his presence, he cheerfully pays his homage. So, in the language of the Bible, he looks to Christ, believes in him, and obeys him.

4. Is sin the object of his attention ? With detestation he views the monster in all its hideous forms, trembles while he surveys the features of shame and misery in its

countenance, and fears lest he should be overcome by the subtle arts it practises. Urged nevertheless by the powerful motives both of interest and love, he boldly wages war with this mighty enemy in every part of his dominion, resolving by the help of God to maintain the struggle to the last, and expecting the victory then through the blood of the Lamb. When, O when, says he, shall this foe of God and man, this restless disturber of my peace, this cruel incendiary of all my hopes and joys be totally vanquished and destroyed?

5. Does he turn the eye of faith on ~~the~~ world? Though alas! his foolish passions are too often elated with its smiles, and too often depressed with its frowns; yet it is the deliberate sentiment of his judgment, that nought beneath his God can make him happy, and the firm resolution of his heart, that nought beneath him shall be the main object of his pursuit. To acquiesce cheerfully in all the pleasure of heaven, he considers as the noblest attainment of the divine life; and therefore at the least aims at it with ardent affection. Nay glorying in the cross of Christ, he feels himself in a degree however thereby crucified to the world, and the world to him. The death is gradual and lingering;

but with every power of his soul he prays it may be sure and effectual.

6. Are his present connections, farther, the subject of his serious contemplation ? his heart expands with benevolence to all mankind, but especially to those with whom friendship and nature have united him. A compassionate tear he drops over the sinner, who is laying violent hands on himself : and the humble convert whose face is set towards the New Jerusalem he congratulates. The good man, whatever be his complexion as to other things, he cordially embraces in the arms of his love : and to the man who hath injured him he hath no other return to make, but pity and forgiveness. In one word,

7. Does faith bring heaven near to the view of his mind ? That idea of it which brightens the prospect, and affords the most animating pleasure to his heart, is the united perfection of purity and bliss which shall be there enjoyed. O happy place ! where God is all in all ; whence sin as well as sorrow shall be for ever excluded ; and where holiness arrayed in all the charms of divine love and joy, shall reign universal and without end. *When I awake from the dust of death, may I behold his face in*

*righteousness, and be for ever satisfied with his likeness! **

Thus you have a general view of the nature, spirit and tendency of true religion. And now, to close what hath been said, with how much reason may we,

i. Appeal to the judgments and consciences of all men, whether there is not a real excellency in what we have thus been describing! Could men but be persuaded to divest themselves for a while of their prejudices, and to listen to the sober dictates of their understanding, if they were honest they would, they must say, that it is the most amiable object which can be presented to the human mind. It is not that cold, dry, lifeless busines which the formal moralist would make it: nor is it that wild, rapturous, unmeaning thing, which the mad enthusiast would represent it. It is a rational, a substantial, a heavenly blessing; an emanation from the Deity, a spark of fire kindled in the soul by God, and *a well of water* in the heart *springing up into everlasting life*^p. Nor let men, because they are themselves wholly estranged from the knowledge and fear of God, or because they can

* Ps. xvii. 15.

^p John iv. 14.

point

point out imperfections, follies and sins in the characters of the best Christians, thence hastily conclude that this account of religion is mere ideal or imaginary. For besides the professions of the worthiest men, and the testimony of the sacred scriptures, there is the highest reason to suppose from the account itself, that what is in its own nature so desirable may possibly have an existence. How much then,

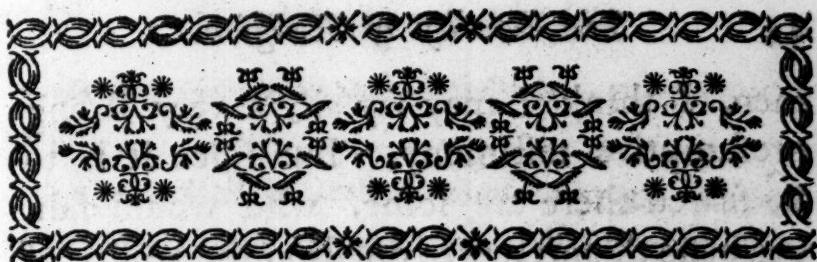
2. Is it to be lamented that so little of real religion is to be found in our world! No subject perhaps hath more generally employed the attention of mankind, and yet none hath been more shamefully mistaken, perverted and abused. Some have so curiously refined upon it, and others have talked so much and so loudly about the circumstances of it, that the thing itself hath been overlooked, forgot and very nigh lost. Can the good man forbear weeping whilst he beholds this? O sad sight indeed! — the greatest part of the world by far, amidst their ready acknowledgments of the truth of religion, bidding open defiance to it! and the rest most of them, by their very talk about it, hardened into a state of absolute insensibility to it! The plainest thing made a problem by dispute!

and

and a matter the most substantial and important evaporating into mere air and smoke! Lament it, sincerely and heartily lament it, Christian; and with your tears mingle your fervent prayers to God, again to revive the dying interests of his kingdom in the world, and to spread the honors and triumphs of it far and wide. In one word,

3. Of what importance is it, that we each of us seriously examine ourselves, upon this question, whether God hath erected his kingdom in our hearts, and in what it consists, whether in *word*, or in *power*! Are we the bold opposers of religion? the nominal professors of it only? or the real partakers of the true spirit and temper of it? Unhappy ^{the} man, who ranks under either of the former characters! remaining in this sad state to the last, he must endure the weight of his iron-rod, whose mild and gracious scepter he hath rejected and despised. But happy, thrice happy he, who amidst all the remains of weakness and sin which attend him, can from his own experience attest the reality of religion; and to whom others, will bear this honourable testimony, that God is in him of a truth.

DISCOURSE



DISCOURSE II.

The Reality of Religion.

P A R T I.

2 T I M. iii. 5.

— *Denying the power.* —

THE nature of serious religion having been considered in the former discourse, let us now enter into a full and particular proof of its reality. At first view indeed, it may seem unnecessary to prove a point, which carries its own evidence with it, and to the truth of which there is in the consciences of most men,

men, I think I may say all, a very strong presumptive testimony. But since it is to be feared there are some, who would fain persuade themselves to question the reality of religion, and since it is notorious that the generality of mankind think very lightly about it ; it cannot but be of considerable use to set the argument, plain as it is, in every light it will admit of, thereby to awaken our attention to the thing itself, as well as to remove every shadow of objection which may be urged against it.

It might then be very naturally expected, that our reasoning on this subject should be deduced from some short proposition, which is directly and fully to our purpose : but as scripture for the most part takes it for granted, that there is such a thing as religion, so it is chiefly employed rather in a diffusive description of the nature of it, than in a concise and express affirmation of its reality. We are therefore obliged to ground our present inquiry on the passage just read, which though it does not directly assert what we would prove, yet immediately leads us into the unhappy occasions of that scepticism and dissipation of mind, which too generally prevail ; and so opens our way to the positive

evidence we have of the truth of religion itself.

The apostle had been speaking, in the beginning of this chapter, of *the last days*. A phrase which some interpret of the age immediately succeeding that of the first establishment of Christianity ; and which others refer to a more distant period of the church. But be that as it may, he tells us that in these days there would be perilous times. Times in which persecution on the one hand, and a general dissoluteness of manners on the other, would prevail to such a degree, as very greatly to try the faith and constancy of all the real professors of religion. From whence he goes on to give us the character of these last days. *Men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, and lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God.* To all which he subjoins the sad and striking description in our text : *Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.* One would indeed have thought, that when men were arrived to such a pitch of wickedness

wickedness as had been just represented, there could hardly have been any circumstance added, still farther to blacken their character. But there was yet one, hypocrisy: that put the finishing stroke to the whole. Amidst these bold impieties, so contrary to the dictates of reason, as well as of divine revelation, they dare to call themselves men of God and religion; and under the mask of external observances, they securely indulge the most diabolical passions, and with little or no remorse perpetrate the most horrid and shameful actions. So by their temper and conduct they *deny*, or contradict the true spirit and *power* of that religion, the external appearance of which they fondly assume.

The language of the text is so expressive, and the uses to which we shall apply it so important, that it will be necessary to inquire a little more particularly, what is meant by *godliness*—what by the *form* and the *power* of it—and who they are who *having* the one, do yet *deny* the other. And,

First, As to *godliness*. The term properly signifies right or acceptable worship¹: so that in the primary sense of it, it is to be restrained to acts of devotion, such as prayer

¹ Εὐσεβία.

and

and praise. Nevertheless it is commonly used to denote all that part of religion, which respects our temper and conduct towards God. Thus it is to be understood here, and thus it stands distinguished from the duties of temperance and justice, in that passage where the apostle exhorts us to live *soberly, righteously and godlily* in the present world¹. Wherefore godliness comprehends in it all the regards, which as creatures we owe to him who hath made us. And since by sin we are reduced to an apostate and depraved state, and God hath thought fit to give us an extraordinary revelation of his will; it follows that there must of necessity be a change in some of the material expressions of our obedience, and in the manner it is to be performed. Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and repentance towards God, are indispensably necessary to form the character of the godly. The man therefore who answers to this description, in the sense of the sacred scriptures, is he who being restored to the knowledge and favor of God, converses with him in his duties, imitates him in his practice, and hopes for ever to enjoy him in heaven; who, sensible that he hath forfeited the di-

¹ Tit. ii. 12.

vine favor, considers his restoration to it as the fruit alone of the mediation of the Lord Jesus Christ ; and on this principle humbly fears to offend him, and chearfully aims to please him. Such is godliness or internal religion, the nature of which hath in the former discourse been fully considered. Now,

Secondly, As to the *form* and the *power* of it. These are terms which require very little explanation. Some indeed interpret the *form* of godliness in this place, of that rule or directory given us concerning it in the book of God, and which the apostle elsewhere calls *the form of sound words*^{*}. And this many have in their hands, who it is to be feared are perfect strangers to the thing itself. Nay too many there are, who while they profess a regard to the letter of the bible, take no small pains to explain away the spirit of it. But the phrase is rather to be understood of the external observances of religion, such as the assembling together for the worship of God, and for the celebration of the two solemn institutions of the Christian dispensation, baptism and the Lord's Supper. These are the *forms* of

* 2 Tim. i. 13.

godliness,

godliness, the outward, natural and just expressions of it. Now to these are opposed the *power* of it, that is, the inward sense, feeling and experience of it ; that principle, spirit or temper, which animates a truly Christian man, just as the soul does the body. Such distinction the apostle frequently makes : as when he says to the Thessalonians, *Our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power^t* ; and to Timothy, *Bodily exercise profiteth little, but godliness is profitable unto all things^u*. Not that the *form* of religion and the *power* of it are at variance : no, the one, as was just observed, is the natural expression of the other. And so far is the word of God from treating the externals of religion with indifference, that it exhorts us with great earnestness to pay a serious attention to them, as the proper means with a divine blessing of begetting, maintaining and promoting the true spirit of godliness. And most certain it is, that though there may be the form, where there is not the reality of religion ; yet there cannot be the reality of religion, where there is not the form of it. But the latter is here opposed to the former to intimate, that the

^t 1 Thes. i. 5.^u 1 Tim. iv. 8.

one is a vain unacceptable useless thing without the other. And from hence we may now easily collect,

Thirdly, The true character of those who are said in our text *to have* the form of godliness, but at the same time *to deny* the power of it. They are either such who rest in the one, without any regard to the other; or such who assume the one, with an hypocritical view of being accounted the real possessors of the other. As to the first of these, few words are necessary to give us a just idea of their character. They place the whole of their religion in external rites and ceremonies, vainly imagining that positive observances will make them acceptable to God; while they pay no sort of attention to the prevailing temper of their hearts, and can perhaps allow themselves in some practices, which are absolutely immoral and criminal. Such there have been, and such it is to be feared there now are: nor is it to be doubted that they come within the description in the text. They have no true knowledge of the nature of spiritual religion, and have no just sense of the importance of it, if they do not even in speculation deny it. And then as to those who hypocritically assume the form of religion, in order to gain the applause

applause of men ; however they may talk much of their regards to the power of godliness, it is as evident they can have no firm faith of its truth impressed on their hearts. Nay their behaviour being in many instances wholly inconsistent with their profession, men of atheistical and profane minds take occasion from hence to dispute the reality of what we would now prove. Thus you see how persons of both these characters, do either absolutely or in effect *deny* the grand thing, which in appearance they may seem to acknowledge. And in much the same sense the word is to be understood, where the apostle declares, that he who provides not for his own, and especially those of his own house, *bath denied the faith*, and is worse than an infidel ^w.

From this general view of the words, which we find exemplified in many sad instances before our own eyes, there appears then the highest reason for a particular consideration of the grand question proposed in this discourse. But in the mean while, it will be of use to inquire briefly into the principal sources of all that doubt and scepticism, which so much prevail in the world,

^w 1 Tim. v. 8.

with regard to the reality of internal and spiritual religion. And these are, the enthusiasm of some who call themselves Christians ; the manifest hypocrisy of others who assume this venerable character ; and the averseness of the depraved hearts of men in general to the thing itself, which is indeed the main cause of infidelity.

I. Prejudices against it have doubtless been confirmed, if not originally excited, by the enthusiasm of some mad pretenders to religion. Admitting that religion is a spiritual thing, it is easy to see how this view of it may give an opportunity to persons of a lively fancy, weak judgment and heated passions, to ingraft that into it which does not belong to it ; such as visions, dreams, ecstasies and other whims which are the fruit of a distempered imagination. So its real appearance is changed, and the true end of it defeated. And thus, assuming a monstrous form, it terrifies some into a kind of obedience to it, while by its absurdities it begets a hasty notion in others, that it is all a delusion. In such manner even good men of an enthusiastic turn of mind, have by over-acting their part, undesignedly disgraced religion, and made many around them rather enemies than friends to

what

what they would wish to promote. This, it is not to be doubted, is an engine of Satan's contrivance, and hath done infinite mischief in the world. Yet, whatever may have been the reveries of some well-meaning Christians, they will by no means authorize the conclusions of atheists and infidels; but if rightly considered, will rather furnish a probable testimony in favor of the truth of religion. So likewise,

2. The hypocrisy, or the ill lives of some men who wear the mask of religion, is a common objection with vast numbers of people to the reality of it. And indeed at first view there seems something very plausible and natural in their usual way of reasoning on this sad circumstance. "Here are men, say they, who profess a high veneration for the scriptures, are very zealous in their attachment to positive institutions, affect the utmost precision and singularity in their appearance, and talk much of what they know, feel and enjoy; and yet are guilty of the most shameful immoralities, such as covetousness, deceit, oppression and dishonesty. What shall we say to this? If religion will not restrain its warmest advocates from vices the most hurtful to society, there surely can be no truth in it."

But the objection, however plausible at first view, is not fairly urged. The conduct of particular persons will not admit of so general an inference. The conclusion is just, that their behaviour gives the lie to *their* profession, and that they are themselves hypocrites and deceivers : but it doth not thence follow that religion itself is a delusion ; unless it can be proved that it authoriseth or countenances such a conduct. On the contrary, their assuming this sacred appearance, that they may the more easily impose upon others, and the more effectually compass their base designs, should rather lead us to conclude, as will hereafter more fully appear, that there probably is a reality in religion ; since they act upon this very principle, that religion is generally supposed to make men good members of society, and that therefore wearing this habit, they shall be the less suspected of the evil they have in view. Nay if there were not a notorious inconsistency between the professions and practices of such persons, they could not be justly deemed hypocrites, nor could there be any ground for the charge of deception. Which being the case, the objection ceases to have any real force

in

in it. We see, however, from hence, the great importance of a Christian's conducting himself in such a manner as to preclude, if possible, all occasion for a kind of reasoning so absurd in itself, and so dangerous in its tendency. But that which hath the chief influence to beget and promote a sceptical temper is,

3. The averseness which prevails in every depraved mind to real godliness. Religion, as we have represented it, is a spiritual thing. It respects objects that are future and invisible. It forbids an immoderate attachment to sensible enjoyments. It lays a restraint on the propensities of nature. And it thwarts and opposes the most violent passions of the human heart. And thence, notwithstanding all the real and important blessings it proposes, it is disagreeable to an unrenewed mind. Now we know from frequent experience, that the will hath a considerable influence on the judgment; and that what we are not disposed to believe, we quickly find out various ways to persuade ourselves is not true. Here therefore we have the principal cause of all the doubt there is in the world concerning the reality of spiritual religion. Men do not like it; and so would fain rid themselves of

the uneasiness, which the supposition of its truth occasions. This puts them upon having recourse to every little art their restless and depraved wits can devise, to weaken and obscure the evidence of what is thus so extremely irksome to them. Till at length having silenced the repeated clamors of conscience, and then very nearly put out the eye of reason itself, they dare, stupid and ignorant as they are, impudently to pronounce it all a lie.

For the conviction therefore of such persons if possible, or however to rouze the attention of the thoughtless, and to confirm the faith of the Christian, I shall endeavour to prove from a few plain topics the truth of serious religion; or in other words, that there is a reality as well in the power, as in the form of godliness.

DISCOURSE

DISCOURSE II.

P A R T II.

THE reality of religion, which is the point we have now to prove, may be argued,

- I. From the reason and nature of the thing ;
- II. From the express testimony of scripture ; and,
- III. From the general consent of all mankind.

I. We begin with the reason and nature of the thing. What I here mean is, that certain principles being admitted, which are either self-evident or are capable of a kind of proof which is no less satisfactory ; it will clearly follow, upon the most sound reasoning, that there must be a reality in spiritual and internal religion.

1. As to those principles which the light of nature teacheth, and which may be styled self-evident as being generally acknowledged; a short review of these will enable us to describe the out-lines of religion, and so to ascertain its truth. It will then be readily granted, that there is a God; that he is a spirit; that all perfection is to be ascribed to him; that we receive our beings, capacities and every support and enjoyment from him; that he hath a right to our homage and obedience; that our chief happiness consists in his favor; that as rational creatures we are capable of knowing him, and conversing with him; and that he being an all-perfect spirit hath intimate access to our spirits. These are principles which need not be proved. And being admitted, the consequence is most obvious and necessary, that if the proper end of our existence be attained, there must be such a thing as contemplating the greatness and glory of God, fearing and loving him, trusting and delighting in him, submitting ourselves intirely to him, and at once imitating and obeying him. This is religion in its pure and primitive state; and these are the natural and genuine expressions of it,

as it is felt and enjoyed by the blessed spirits above, in the highest perfection.

Now as it is reasonable to expect, that a degree of this divine and heavenly attainment should be communicated to those, who, as will hereafter appear, are designed for that blissful world; so you clearly see that the chief business of it must respect the inward temper and disposition of the heart. Nay such is our original frame and construction, that there is not one power of the human soul which is not capable of some one religious affection, and which is not the proper seat of it. So far then the idea of religion, as opposed to mere external form and appearance, stands approved by the plain dictates of reason and common sense. Men must renounce their reason, and become downright Atheists, if they will affirm that it hath nothing to do with the heart of man, and respects only his outward behaviour. But since it is a farther dictate of reason, that whatever discoveries God is pleased to make of his will, they are all the proper objects of religion, and demand such dispositions and affections as are answerable to their nature; let us now go on,

2. To those notices which he hath actually given us of himself, and of our condition both here and hereafter. The proofs indeed of their authenticity must be referred to the next head of discourse ; but it is necessary that we here in general mention them, to complete our idea of religion, and to enable us from thence to argue its pure and spiritual nature. If it be a fact then, that the soul of man is immortal, and will exist for ever in a future state either of happiness or of misery ; that we are all guilty before God, and so all liable to his wrath ; and that we are all through sin become unlike him, and so incapable while in an unrenewed state of truly enjoying and serving him : if it be a fact, that God hath set forth Jesus his Son to be a propitiation for sin, and hath exhibited him in a great variety of other views, the most important to our present and future interests : and in a word, if it be a fact, that the Holy Spirit is the author of all divine and heavenly grace, and that through his effectual influence the depraved nature is formed into the likeness of God, and fitted for the everlasting fruition of him : it follows then from the reason and nature of the thing, that religion must be that internal spiritual concern, it hath

hath been represented in the preceding discourse.

The universal apostacy of mankind from God being acknowledged, it is a necessary consequence that we can have no intercourse again with heaven, without contrition and humiliation of heart ; and that we cannot be saved and become happy, without being renewed in the spirit and temper of our minds. Now the very expressions of repentance and renovation, instantly convey a clear idea of what we would prove. So that these exercises of the soul are not the wild flights of enthusiasm, but real substantial rational religion. In like manner, the sacrifice and mediation of our Lord Jesus Christ being admitted, as the only ground of a sinner's reconciliation and acceptance with God, we at once see how faith, hope, love and joy enter deeply into the experience of the Christian, and become the main springs of that new life he lives, and of that new obedience he yields to the commands of God. The same also may be said with respect to the influence and operation of the blessed Spirit, the exceeding great and precious promises of the Bible, and the glorious realities of a future world. Such is the nature of these doctrines that, if we af-

fent

sent to them as true, we must be sensible that they are adapted to strike the heart and conscience, and to influence all the dispositions and affections of the soul; and that therefore there is a reality as well in the power, as the form of godliness. If God be a perfect and spiritual Being, the rational and spiritual natures with which he hath endowed us, must be employed in his service. If we are sinners and reconciled to him, the notion of our guilt and his mercy teaches us our obligations to faith and repentance. If the Son of God be set before us as our Mediator and Saviour, the Holy Spirit as our Guide and Comforter, and the joys of heaven as our everlasting portion; there must be excited in our breasts affections suited to these discoveries, such as hope, confidence, delight, submission and obedience.

But it will be said, whence does the reality of all these supposed objects of religion appear? For an answer to this inquiry we shall therefore now immediately hasten to the

II. General head of argument, the express testimony of Scripture. And here we will in a few words shew — that the discoveries

discoveries which have been just mentioned, as the principal grounds of religion, are the plain dictates of the Bible — that this sacred book doth thence expressly infer the reality of spiritual and internal religion — and then, that the book itself comes supported with all the evidence of divine testimony, which can be reasonably desired.

1. It can hardly be questioned that what hath been affirmed of the soul of man, of his present fallen condition, and of the method of his recovery to the favor and likeness of God, is the plain language of the Bible. As to the soul, it assures us that its nature is spiritual and immortal ; that however men may kill the body, they have not this power over the conscious spirit within^{*}; and that immediately on its departure hence, it is either happy, to use the figurative language of our Saviour, *in the bosom of Abraham*, or being in hell, *lifts up its eyes in torments*^y. As to the present state of mankind, it is declared to be depraved and apostate ; that whereas *God made man upright, he hath sought out many inventions*^z ; and that *there is none that doth good, no not one*^a. So that the *whole world being guilty,*

* Matth. x. 28.

y Luke xvi. 23.

^z Eccles. vii. 29.

^a Rom. iii. 12.

he hath concluded all under sin^b; and if he were strict to mark iniquity, no one could stand in his sight^c. As to our recovery from these guilty and degenerate circumstances, it is expressly declared to be by the mediation, sacrifice and righteousness of Emmanuel, God with us: that *in him the beloved we are accepted^d*; that *through his blood we have remission of sin^e*; and that *by his obedience many are made righteous^f*. And in a word, as to the application of the blessings of the new covenant to the hearts of men, we are assured it is by the influence and operation of the divine Spirit: so we are said to be *born of the Spirit^g, who is given unto us^h*, and *dwellⁱeth in us*; and *saved by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost^k*. Thus, as *sin bath reigned unto death, grace reigneth through righteousness, unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord^l*. Thus, through *Christ we have access by faith into the grace wherein we stand^m*. And thus we rejoice in *hope of the glory of God, having his love shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which*

^b Rom. iii. 19. Gal. iii. 22.

^c Ps. cxxx. 3.

^d Eph. i. 6.

^e Matth. xxvi. 28.

^f Rom. v. 19.

^g John iii. 6.

^h Rom. v. 5.

ⁱ Cor. iii. 13.

^k Tit. iii. v.

^l Rom. v. 21.

^m Rom. v. 2.

is given unto usⁿ. Such are some of the main doctrines which divine revelation teaches, interspersed through almost every page of sacred writ, and illustrated by a variety and copiousness of expression, which will not admit of a particular recital in this place. And now,

2. What are the inferences which the scriptures hence draw as to the nature of religion? They are such as plainly shew it to be that rational spiritual and practical exercise of the mind and heart, which hath been already so fully represented. *God is a spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth^o.* *He desireth truth in the inward parts^p,* and *looketh not on the outward appearance, but on the heart^q:* wherefore *with the mind we must serve the Lord^r.* *His kingdom is not in word but in power^s:* *it is not meat and drink; but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost^t:* *it cometh not with external shew and observation, but is within us^u.* *We are, if good men, the temples of the living God^v,* *his habitation through the spirit^x,* enlightened by

ⁿ Rom. v. 5.

^o John iv. 24.

^p Ps. li. 6.

^q 1 Sam. xvi. 7.

^r Rom. vii. 25.

^s 1 Cor. iv. 20.

^t Rom. xiv. 17.

^u Luke xvii. 20, 21.

^w 2 Cor. vi. 16.

^x Eph. ii. 22.

his pure word, and perfumed with the sweet incense of his grace. *He dwells in us, and walks in us*^y. His grace is the anointing which we have received of God, and which abideth in us^z. The good seed which he hath sown in the heart, and which remaineth there^a. And the water of life which he hath given unto us, and which is in us a well of water springing up unto everlasting life^b. It is the hidden man of the heart, and that apparel which is not corruptible, and which is in the sight of God of great price^c. In a word, the fruits of it are love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance^d. So that he is not a Jew, that is a man of real religion, who is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew who is one inwardly: and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter, whose praise is not of men, but of God^e.

Thus do the sacred records every where describe the nature, and assert the reality of serious religion, assuring us that the heart is the grand seat of it, and exemplifying

^y 2 Cor. vi. 16.^z 1 John ii. 27.^a 1 John iii. 9.^b John iv. 14.^c 1 Pet. iii. 4.^d Gal. v. 22, 23.^e Rom. ii. 28, 29.

the genuine effects of it, with the various weaknesses and imperfections which attend it, in the writings and lives of the most eminent Patriarchs Prophets and Apostles, who have flourished in the Church of God. And if,

3. The scriptures, which thus ascertain the grounds of religion and from thence infer the spiritual and practical nature of it, shall clearly appear to be a book divinely inspired and truly containing the mind and will of God, the grand point to be proved will surely be established by the fullest and best evidence. And who can with any pretence of reason question the divinity of this book, while he reflects on the character of the writers of it ? Men, who as they affirmed they were inspired of God, so appear by their plain and nervous manner of writing to have been no enthusiasts, on the one hand ; and by their upright and unblameable lives to have been no impostors, on the other. Men who boldly withstood the prevailing passions and prejudices of mankind, exposed themselves hereby to the greatest inconveniences and sufferings, and many of them actually laid down their lives in confirmation of the doctrine they taught. Who can admit a suspicion of the truth of this book,

while he duly considers the antiquity and simplicity of it ; the purity excellence and sublimity of the discoveries it makes ; and the many wonderful facts it relates, especially the miracles death resurrection and ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ, all which are supported by the most natural and convincing testimony ? Who can doubt of this, while he farther takes into his account the various prophecies therein contained, the exact accomplishment of some of them in former ages, as appears by profane as well as sacred history, and the fulfilment of others in our own times, particularly those respecting the present state of Judaism Popery and Mahometanism ? To which must be added the amazing success and spread of the gospel upon the first publication of it, and the admirable fruits it hath uniformly produced in the hearts and lives of men, wherever it hath been dispensed in its native and genuine simplicity. Nor have we any reason to doubt that the Bible hath been truly conveyed down to us ; since, besides all the other evident marks of authenticity which are clearly to be seen upon it, the New Testament, with which the Old stands intimately and necessarily connected, is sufficiently proved to be incorrupt, by the many versions

versions it very early received into various different languages, and by the numerous citations made from it by some of its bitterest enemies.

The principles of religion being thus laid down, and the spiritual nature of it thence expressly inferred, in a book which thus evidently appears to have come from God, the point to be proved is you see established by divine authority. We are assured, as if by a voice from heaven, that godliness is not a mere form, but that there is a real substantial vital energy in it; and that it is in truth the word of God, which effectually worketh in all them that believe.

DISCOURSE II.

PART III.

IT now remains that we complete the evidence which hath been adduced by adding,

III. The consent of mankind in general, at some season or other of their lives, to this important truth. And however sceptical or unbelieving the minds of some men may be, and however the conduct of others may contradict their profession; yet we may be bold to affirm that this hath been and still is the case.

i. Let the man of a dissolute and profane character stand forth and say, whether amidst all his ignorance folly and impiety, he hath not on some occasion at least felt an alarming attestation in his breast to the divinity of religion. There is such a thing surely as conscience. And that, like a faithful

faithful monitor, hath in a thousand instances been heard to say, "Verily there is " a reward for the righteous, there is a " God who judgeth in the earth. His eye " is upon thee; and all thy thoughts dis- " positions and resolutions, as well as all " thine outward actions, he will one day " bring into judgment." Yea conscience hath assumed the character of a judge, as well as a monitor, arraigned the sinner at its awful tribunal, entered into the secrets of his heart, and having accused convicted and condemned him, hath as it were ordered him forth to execution. And O the extreme anguish of the wicked, while they have thus heard the just sentence of divine wrath pronounced in their ears; and have felt the beginnings of future misery, in all the fear shame and confusion which the present apprehension of it excites! How have their countenances changed, like Belshazzar's at the sight of the finger against the wall! And how have their thoughts troubled them, so that the joints of their loins have been loosened, and their knees have smote one against another! To such checks, such starts, such fits of melancholy, or whatever other name may be given it, few wicked men are perfect strangers. And

though when the paroxysm is over, and the violence of their fears is somewhat abated, they may take pains to persuade themselves out of a belief of the just and natural consequence of these convictions, by fond conceits of superstition imagination and bodily disorder ; yet surely they cannot coolly reflect on what hath passed, without shrewdly suspecting that there is such a thing as religion, and that conscience is the counterpart of God's holy word. Such are the feelings then of the profligate.

And admitting that there are some few of this character, who in the midst of life and health have the happiness, as they judge it, to escape these tempests within ; there are nevertheless innumerable instances of bad men, who in the immediate view of an eternal world, have been obliged to join issue with the Bible, and to acknowledge in the presence of surrounding spectators, that this is no cunningly devised fable, but a most important reality. And however even the soberer part of mankind may too many of them think lightly of the inward power of godliness ; yet when the interesting scenes of a future state are very nearly before their eyes, there are few of them but do acknowledge, either directly or indirectly, that some-

thing more is necessary to make them meet for the enjoyment of God, than that general decency of external conduct in which they have unhappily placed the essence of religion. Thus you see the men who deny the power of godliness, whether we take them from among the openly profane or those of only a mere moral behaviour, they are all obliged at some time or other of their lives, to fall in with the convictions of conscience, and to submit to the mighty force of truth. But to their testimony may be added,

2. That of hypocrisy itself. A kind of proof this which, however unnatural it may seem at first view, will on examination appear no less rational and convincing than that just mentioned. Hypocrites, it is well known, freely and openly declare their firm faith of the truth of serious religion. But it is not to their professions, however positive and clamorous, that any regard is here paid, since it is agreed on all hands that they are bad men, and that therefore their word is not to be credited, especially in a matter wherein it is their interest to deceive. They have not put off the old man, as some one expresses it, but only put the new upon it. Yet, from a contemplation of the intire character motives and conduct

conduct of such persons, an inference may be drawn, which amounts to at least a very strong presumptive proof of the grand point in question. A hypocrite is one who assumes a character which does not belong to him, in order thereby to impose upon others, and so gain some advantage to himself. Now the character he assumes must itself have something excellent and pleasing in it, and must be supposed to have a real existence somewhere, otherwise his assuming it could be of no advantage to him at all. No designing man would, in order to gain the confidence and esteem of another, put on an appearance which is unfavourable and very generally disapproved ; or pretend to that which is in its own nature impossible, or however most unlikely to be deemed true.

To apply this then to matters of religion. Here is one who confidently affirms he is what a man of godliness hath been represented to be. It is admitted that he is not such a person, that he aims to deceive, and that he expects to acquire some worldly emolument thereby. But does it hence follow that godliness, the appearance of which he hath thus drawn like a veil over his iniquity, is itself a delusion ? No surely. There rather hence arises a very strong presumption

sumption in favor of the truth of it. For if this man be artful, as most hypocrites are, it is hardly imaginable that he would set up a claim to what has no foundation at all, either in excellency or truth. It is therefore, on the contrary, the plain language of his conduct, that the character he mimics is a possible and probable one, that it is truly excellent and venerable, and moreover that wise and good men have actually professed it, and been generally supposed to be endowed with it. For if thus much be not admitted, hypocrisy would be a mighty harmless thing, and the pretender to religion would rather deserve the name of an enthusiast than a deceiver.

To the resentment then which mankind commonly feel at the very name of a hypocrite we may appeal, for at least the high probability of the truth of religion. There can not be a semblance without a reality, a shadow without a substance, a picture without an original. Wherever therefore we see a hypocrite, we have a clear and undeniable proof before our eyes, that some worthy persons do profess religion, and likewise a strong presumptive evidence that what they thus profess is true. Thus one of the sharpest and most successful weapons, which hath ever

ever been employed in the service of infidelity, may with a very little reflection be wrested out of its hands, and turned with double fury on itself. And thus a vice the most detestable of all others, may in some sort atone for the infinite mischief it hath done in the world, by becoming an able advocate for the truth it once persecuted and abused. But there are other witnesses to be examined on this important question, who though they may be prejudiced in favor of the fact they attest, yet justly merit an impartial hearing. These are,

3. Good men. By good men we here mean those who are generally acknowledged to be such, who whether religion be or be not true, are amiable patterns of virtue and useful members of society. Now if persons of this character do most, if not all of them, profess a regard to the power of godliness ; if what they profess hath in its own nature a tendency to excite them to a conduct thus excellent and praise-worthy ; if they assure us that it is this sense of religion upon their spirits which disposes them to behave in this manner ; if they adhere to their profession amidst all opposition ; and in one word, if they express their satisfaction as to the truth and importance of religion

religion, when in the immediate views of death ; their testimony, added to the proofs already brought, must surely set this matter with every impartial mind beyond a doubt.

It is indeed acknowledged, that there may be persons of an external good behaviour, whose motives rise no higher than mere principles of humanity and good nature. But it is a fact not to be disputed that the most respectable and worthy characters which have adorned the world, and to which even infidels themselves have borne an honourable testimony, have been found among the friends of serious religion. Integrity meekness benevolence and the other social virtues, have ever been the offspring of a lively faith of the gospel of Christ. *The grace of God which bringeth salvation teacheth men to deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live righteously, and soberly, and godlily in the present evil world^f.* Such is the very spirit of the Christian institution. When therefore the good man declares that it thus operates on his heart, his declaration, so intirely consonant to every dictate of sound reason, and so well supported by the general course of his life, may

^f Tit. ii. 11, 12.

justly

justly demand our credit : especially when we see him persisting in this his profession, amidst all the contempt and obloquy cast upon him by a profane world, and even in the extreme moments of life, when it is beyond the power of the most refined hypocrisy to conceal the genuine sentiments of the heart.

Let us figure to ourselves then the man of religion in his real and proper character, and say whether a strong presumptive evidence of the truth of godliness does not hence force itself on our consciences. Nor will we exalt the Christian above humanity, or dress him in the fair habit which flattery may have too often given him : but we will view him as he is, a frail imperfect sinful man ; yet behaving under the commanding influence of those divine truths he professes, and labouring to adorn them by a holy and unblameable conversation. Behold him then honest in his dealings, faithful to his engagements, and chaste in his connections ; daily lamenting innumerable mistakes, yet afraid of sin and of every distant approach to it ; using the world to the purposes of clearfulness and benevolence, yet not abusing it to covetousness or profligacy ; fearful of temptation, yet resolutely opposing

opposing it ; feeling his afflictions, yet not daring to murmur at them ; aiming to do good, though often disappointed in his attempts : in a word, a lover of good men, a friend of society, and a blessing to all around him. And now hear him, his character thus established, pronouncing religion in the light it hath been represented a substantial and important truth, openly professing it in the face of the whole world, and renouncing his temporal interests for the sake of it. Hear all this and say, whether a testimony thus authenticated ought not, will not have weight with every thoughtful mind.

But if this does not satisfy, if a secret dislike of religion still forces on the mind a doubt of the good man's sincerity ; follow him to his dying bed, see him lying thereon with a cheerful composure of mind, and take from his own lips the evidence he faithfully gives in favor of what he hath dared to profess, and what hath been the governing principle of his life. " Verily, " says he, there is a reward for the righteous, there is a God who judgeth in the earth. This hath been my firm faith, and is now the joy of my heart. Religion is a reality : its power I feel, its supports

“ ports I enjoy. In God I have put my trust,
“ and he is faithful and good. To Christ I
“ have committed my everlasting interests,
“ and he is able to keep them against that
“ day. Heaven, unworthy as I am, I hope
“ shortly to possess, and to possess it as the
“ free gift of God through Jesus Christ my
“ Lord. O how my heart aspires to that
“ pure and exalted state! Thanks be to the
“ good Spirit of God, who hath wrought
“ me for this self-same thing. I have
“ waited, O Lord, for thy salvation — I
“ have seen it — let me now depart in peace
“ — into thy hands I resign my spirit.”

The force of such evidence is hardly to be withheld — the heart feels it — the conscience yields to it. And that this hath been the fact in many pleasing instances is not to be questioned.

Thus we have I hope fully proved the truth of internal religion, from the reason and nature of the thing, from the express testimony of scripture, and from the general consent of mankind. What remains now but that we spend a few moments, in expostulating with the unbeliever on his folly and madness, in reproaching the disingenuity and baseness of the hypocrite, and in congratulating the Christian on the real happiness he possesses?

i. Is there a man, who after what hath been said, can lay his hand upon his breast, and say he firmly believes that the religion of the heart is all a fable? One should imagine it impossible. But if such an instance is to be found, we may be bold to affirm, and that without any breach of charity, that a sentence thus pronounced in favor of vice and sin, can never be the genuine dictate of the conscience. To believe that religion is all a lie, is a kind of faith which one should suspect, is too hard to be attained by a human mind: a mystery, I had just said, beyond any thing the bible reveals. No. Unbelief is the proper offspring of a judgment unnaturally over-powered and prostituted by sense,

Say not then that you have reason on your side. No one sober dictate of it can support you in your infidelity. While therefore you treat this great object with contempt and ridicule, you betray a weakness and folly, which will be an eternal reproach to your understanding; and a bitterness and enmity of heart, which will one day bring upon you inexpressible misery. What if all you have heard should happen to prove true? How great will be your confusion in the hour of death! And how great your surprize the instant you launch into eter-

nity ! How will you lift up your eyes before the tribunal of that God, whose revealed will you have trampled under foot, and whose reasonings by the voice of conscience itself you have rejected and despised ! O consider these things all ye that forget God, lest he tear you in pieces and there be none to deliver. But to hasten,

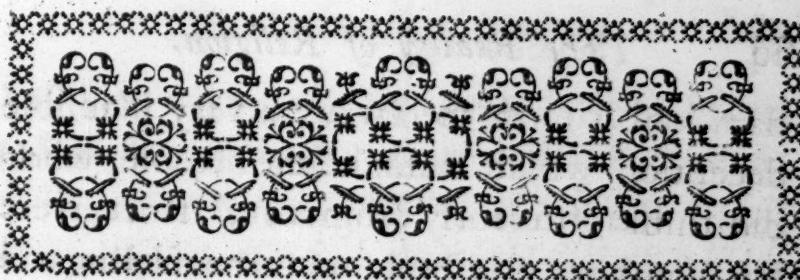
2. If the condemnation of the infidel will be dreadful, how much more that of the hypocrite ! — the man who in order to answer some secular purposes to himself, puts on the form of godliness, while he inwardly denies the power of it, and laughs at the whole as a cheat. A more unnatural base and detestable character than this cannot be imagined. It exposes a person to the resentments both of the good and the bad, and betrays a meanness which renders him absolutely unworthy of society. Whether religion be or be not true, such a man must in the end be a loser. If it be not true, though he escapes future misery, yet it is a thousand to one, but his hypocrisy is suspected, and of consequence his schemes defeated ; however it is certain that sooner or later he must sink into contempt in the opinion of all around him.

But if on the other hand religion should prove true, what tenfold vengeance will fall on
the

the guilty head of this wretched man, in the great day of account! — that day when the secrets of all hearts shall be laid open, and the God of truth shall with the loud applause of angels and men, and indeed the full approbation of the condemned himself, frown him from his presence into the lake of fire and brimstone which burneth forevermore. No excuse can be offered for him, and every circumstance which can be imagined will crowd upon him, to aggravate his guilt and heighten his misery. Be think yourself, O man, in time. Religion is true. Ask your conscience, and it will tell you so. Increase not then your guilt by your hypocrisy. Neither in this way bring the blood of any others around you on your own head. But throw the mask aside. Acknowledge your sin, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. To close the whole,

3. And lastly. How great, Christian, is your felicity! You have believed religion to be a reality, and have found it to be so in your own experience. You have the witness in yourself, and you have the pleasure to see every other kind of testimony concurring with this of your own mind and conscience. Few indeed around you are duly affected with this great concern; yet few

dare look you in the face, and say it is all a deception. But though the whole world did think differently from you, if nevertheless you have the bible and the feelings of your own heart on your side, what will it signify? And though in the end you should be mistaken, yet you will have no cause to repent that you have given firm credit to such matters, as have tended to make you a happier and better man, and a more cheerful and useful member of society. But the truth is great, and it will prevail. Religion is a reality, and built on such principles as cannot deceive. Rejoice then, O believer, amidst all the contempt that is cast upon you by a profane and wicked world. Rejoice in the truth. Place a firm confidence in Christ as your Saviour, and give all diligence to make your calling and election sure. Be confirmed in the grounds of your faith, and pray to God that the fruits of it may so appear in your heart and life, as to put the truth of religion itself and your own interest in it beyond all dispute. And look forward with pleasure and triumph to that day, when all doubt and scepticism shall be for ever absorbed and lost, in the brightness and certainty of the heavenly world.



DISCOURSE III.

The Sameness of Religion.

P A R T I.

I COR. xii. 13.

—*And have been all made to drink into
one spirit.*

T is a reflection highly pleasing to
I a serious mind, that religion, the
nature and reality of which we
have explained and proved, is one
and the same thing in every good man. Nor
is there in this argument entertainment only,
but the most important use: for on the

one hand it tends to obviate a very plausible objection, which hath often been urged against the truth of religion, as if it were not of divine original, because it hath and doth assume such various external appearances ; and on the other, it happily tends to promote a firm union and a cordial affection among all those who are interested in this heavenly blessing. Nor could fitter language be used to convey this cheerful and improving idea of real godliness, than that in our text ; whether we be Jews or Gentiles, bond or free, if we truly fear God, *we have been all made to drink into one spirit.*

The apostle had been discoursing at large concerning spiritual gifts, of which he tells the Corinthians, there was a very great diversity in the church of God. But reflecting how much they were disposed to animosities and divisions, which was indeed the principal occasion of his writing this epistle, he reminds them that whatever variety of gifts there might be among them, there was but one spirit whence they all proceeded ; and that the great end for which they were given was likewise but one, even the general edification of the whole. This leads him into a very apt and familiar comparison of the church with the natural

natural body. *As the body*, says he in the preceding verse, *is one and hath many members, and all the members of that one body being many, are one body: so also is Christ.* “ As the natural body, though composed “ of many members, whose situation “ strength use and beauty are various, is “ but one body; so the church of Christ, “ though it consist of many individuals, “ whose stations abilities and usefulness “ may be various, is likewise but one “ body, of which Jesus Christ is the head.” *For, adds he, by one spirit we are all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free: and have been all made to drink into one spirit.* A manifest allusion there is here to the two institutions of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. By the former, which is an emblem of regeneration, we are initiated into the church, incorporated and joined together, declared to be the disciples of Jesus, and so to make one body. And by the latter, which exhibits a lively representation of the doctrine and grace of Christ, we profess to drink into one spirit, to have the same divine temper diffused through all our hearts, and to be knit together in affection and love. To much the same purpose he expresses

himself in another place, where he is professedly speaking of this sacred rite, *We being many are one bread*^s.

Now by this figurative mode of speech in the text, the apostle would farther instruct us, not only that the many members which compose the church of Christ, do in fact make one body ; but likewise that there is a *sameness* in the religion itself, as it hath been already explained, which thus unites them to one another. This is admirably illustrated by the distinction he observes between the soul and body, and their union in one person. The body and soul are the two parts which constitute a man. As the body, with all its members, is but one ; so the soul, with all its various powers and affections, is but one likewise : and these two being united make but one man. In like manner, as the several individuals which compose the church of God, however scattered through the world, and however different in their external aspect and appearance, make but one body ; so this body is inhabited and quickened by one spirit. It is in a sense one soul, one mind, one temper, which possesses all good men. At the table of our Lord we all drink of one cup ; and thus in the great

business of religion we all drink into one spirit: we are of the same nature, and make as it were one person.

But if we consider the words detached from either of these allusions, the sense will very well agree with other metaphorical descriptions of religion in the book of God, and upon the whole amount to the same thing. We often read of water, of living water, of drawing water out of the wells of salvation, and of thirsting and drinking^b. By which expressions are undoubtedly meant the inward spirit and experience of religion, with the many comforts and blessings of it. Now, says the apostle, whatever be our character or circumstances in other respects, yet having felt the renewing influence of the grace of God, we have been all made to drink into one spirit. We have all hungered and thirsted after righteousness, have all been led to the same fountain-head, and have all, in our different proportion, drank of the same divine blessings which freely and largely flow thence. So he expresses himself, speaking of the fathers of the Old Testament church, *They did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that*

^b John iv. 14.—vii. 38. Isa. xii. 3.

spiritual

spiritual rock which followed them ; and that rock was Christ¹.

Upon the whole then, the sense of the words is manifestly this, that religion, in regard of the internal spiritual and practical part of it, is uniformly the same in every good man. Now in order to the right improvement of this proposition, we will,

I. Briefly descant on that diversity of natural and external circumstances, which often attends the experience and practice of religion.

II. Inquire wherein consists that uniformity, which the text assures us there is in religion itself. And then,

III. Point out the grounds and reasons of this, which will serve to prove the truth of the observation, and still farther to explain and illustrate it.

I. As to that diversity of natural and external circumstances which attends the profession of religion ; it will be necessary to take a general view of it, in order to set the contrast in the stronger light, and especially as the apostle himself directs us to it in the very text. And,

¹ 1 Cor. x. 3, 4.

i. It is obvious to every one, that there is a wide difference among those who fear God, in respect of their outward and worldly circumstances. Religion is not confined to any particular nation or age of the world, nor to any particular rank or condition of men. It is not a blessing peculiar to the Christian æra, to this country, or to the poor only. One may be a Greek and another a Jew ; one a Barbarian and another a Scythian ; one bond and another free. The water of life, like the river of paradise, spreads itself through various and distinct parts of the earth ; and sometimes springs up in hearts where we little expect to find it, and without any external or visible means of communication. The young and the old, the rich and the poor, the honourable and the despised, have all of them, that is, some of each condition, drank into the same spirit. Here we shall see one cloathed in rags, whose inner man is nevertheless adorned with that apparel which is incorruptible, and in the sight of God of great price. And there again another in affluent circumstances, and in an exalted station of life, who is nevertheless poor in spirit, and judges it his chief honor that he ranks among the humble disciples of the meek and lowly Jesus : a prince

on

on a throne, and a peasant in a cottage; a Job and a Solomon, a Lazarus and a Daniel. No uniformity is necessary in regard of these things. In like manner,

2. There is a remarkable difference among good men, as to their intellectual capacities, and their natural tempers. These, be they what they may, are not the tests by which the characters of the disciples of Jesus are to be decisively determined. That is to say, the man who in respect of natural endowments is a fool, or but one remove from that denomination, may yet be enriched with divine wisdom. And he who was born with a ruggedness of disposition, which is not to be entirely mastered in the present life, may yet have his heart in the main right towards God. And so on the other hand it would be very perverse to suppose, that either good sense or good nature are any real obstructions to true religion. Fact sufficiently confirms the justness of these observations.

Many serious Christians we perhaps daily converse with, who hardly know how to reason upon the plainest point; while some here and there are possessed of powers so refined and exalted, as to render them capable of the closest thought, and of the most curious and

and abstruse speculations. And so as to natural temper; how soft mild and gentle is the disposition of some! and how sharp perverse and unyielding that of others! The apostles Peter and John are remarkable instances of the variety in the temperament, if I may so express it, of their animal spirits. The one is hot bold and precipitate, the other soft tender and affectionate. And it is I imagine this difference of natural constitution, which gives rise to those various appearances we see religion often assume. The weakness of their intellects will not allow some Christians to discern, with that clearness that might be wished, the consistency of divine truths, and their mutual dependance on each other. And the sharpness of their wits is mighty apt to tempt others into refinements, which are of a very trifling nature, if not hurtful as to their tendency. Hence that variety of sentiment among even good men themselves, about those matters which affect not the vitals of religion. But most of the dissensions which prevail in the Christian church, are rather owing to some unhappy defect in men's tempers than in their judgments. It is not their religion which makes them at all unkind and severe, and so alienates and divides,

vides them. That will, it does in a good degree cure these disorders of the mind, and prevent the ill effects of them. Allowance is however to be made for the consideration, that nature hath not cast them all in the same mould; while at the same time we admit that the grace of God hath made them all drink into the same spirit. Again,

3. The difference may be considerable, in respect of the particular dispensations forms and means of religion they may be under. The same degree of light hath not been enjoyed, nor hath the same mode of worship obtained from the beginning. The knowledge of the Messiah was gradually increasing, through the Antediluvian the Patriarchal and the Mosaic, to the Christian age. And as one dispensation by divine appointment succeeded another, so each produced a change in the means of religion, which grew more and more instructive and animating, the nearer they advanced to the simplicity and spirituality of the gospel state. But this produced no alteration in religion itself: that remained immutably the same. The men of God before the flood, drank into the same spirit with those who flourished in the time of the prophets; and these again were saved in the very same

way, and shared in the same divine temper, with those whose happy lot hath fallen under the clear light of the Christian dispensation. *The gospel was preached unto the Fathers as well as unto us : and they all did eat of the same spiritual meat, and did all drink of the same spiritual drink, even of the rock that followed them, which rock was Christ**. The immediate disciples of Jesus were men of true religion, as well amidst the darkness which veiled their apprehensions during his ministry on earth, as amidst that divine light, which shone around them on the day of Pentecost. The Jews worshipped God in a manner very different from us ; but their forms, I mean as used by good men, were animated with the same spirit, which is the life and glory of those fewer and plainer institutions in use among us. And though some of the wisest and best men of this and the preceding ages, have differed in their opinions concerning the circumstantials both of the doctrine and discipline of the Christian church ; yet it would be the height of madness, and I will add impiety too, to question their uniformity in the great business of religion itself. And however some Christians stand distinguished from others in regard of the

* Heb. iv. 2. 1 Cor. x. 3, 4.

excellency,

excellency purity and spirituality of those means they enjoy; yet their experiences of divine things most certainly are, and indeed necessarily must be, similar. So again,

14. The diversity there is of spiritual gifts infers no real diversity as to religion itself. A circumstance I the rather mention, as the apostle so largely insists on it in this context. *There are differences, says he, of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.* To one is given *the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge; to another faith; to another the gifts of healing; to another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues**; but all is of one God who divideth to every man severally as he will; and every man, however characterized or distinguished by these gifts, if he be a Christian indeed, hath been made to drink into the same spirit. Miracles, it is true, are now ceased; yet the observation, so far as it respects that variety of talents for usefulness with which one Christian is distinguished from another, is equally applicable to the present times.

* 1 Cor. xii. 5, 6, 8, 9, 10.

Whatever

Whatever these may be, whether for public rule and instruction in the church of God, or for private counsel and edification, they very well consist, and indeed are only truly amiable, when connected with that charity divine love or spiritual religion, without which the apostle assures us in the very next chapter after the text, they are all nothing. To which it is to be added once more,

5. That there may be, and often is, a difference as to the degree of religion, though it still retains the same nature. An observation this so common that it needs little or no illustration. There are, in the language of scripture, babes young men and fathers in Christ; some weak, and others strong in faith; some eminent for the purity of their devotion, the warmth of their love, and the chearfulness of their obedience; and others in whose hearts are to be seen the sparks only of this divine fire. And yet Christians are all children of the same father, partakers of the same nature, and initiated into the same religion.

Such then is the diversity of natural and external circumstances, which often attend the experience and profession of religion.

DISCOURSE III.

PART II.

LE T us now then turn our eyes from these circumstances to the thing itself, and inquire,

II. Wherein consists that uniformity in religion, which our text mentions as a peculiar commendation of its real and intrinsic excellency.

By the sameness of religion is here meant, the exact similarity there is in the spirit and temper of all good men. As the several individuals of mankind are all made of one blood, and as the same faculty of reason in a greater or less degree, is common to each of the human species; so what the scripture calls *a new creature*^k, is one divine or spiritual nature common to all the people of God. And this is precisely the same now

^k 2 Cor. v. 17.

it was in the beginning, and will indeed ever continue immutably the same in every age, in every part of the world, and in every heart which is renewed by the grace of God. It is what our Saviour calls the *one thing needful*¹. Here then our business is not immediately with the doctrines of religion, these being rather the objects of it, than the thing itself. Though it is most certain, that as truth can be but one, so the apprehensions of all good men concerning it, must exactly correspond in regard of those particulars of it, which do immediately affect the existence of the new nature in the heart. Not can we speak of inward piety, without keeping in view the grand objects of it, which have been more or less clearly revealed to the minds of men, according as the infinite wisdom and goodness of God have judged most fit and necessary.

Now the main expressions of inward religion may be comprised in the short account of it. It first humbles the heart of man —— then inspires it with divine hopes and joys — by this means refines and sanctifies it — and so makes it capable of a pure love and exalted friendship. And in respect

¹ Luke x. 42.

of each of these particulars there is an exact uniformity, at least in a degree, among all the people of God. They have all been made to drink into the same spirit.

1. Religion humbles and abases the heart before God. Where is the good man to be found, who hath not been struck with an awful apprehension of the truth and dignity of the divine perfections, and with a deep sense of his own vileness and unworthiness? While faith presents the blessed God to our view in his infinite omniscience, his spotless purity, his almighty power, and his transcendent glory, we vanish into nothing before him. The lively display of these his attributes in the works of nature and providence, in the righteous dictates of his holy law, and the propitiatory sufferings of his own Son, commands our homage and dread. We admire and wonder, adore and tremble. And so turning our eyes inward on ourselves, traversing our hearts through the various and secret mazes of vanity and sin, observing how unlike we are to the pure and perfect God, and how short we come of our obligations to his holy law, reflecting on the pollution of our natures, and the aggravated guilt of our lives; we are covered with shame at this sad scene,

and

and readily acknowledge ourselves the chief of sinners. And then conceiving some hope of the mercy of God, through the great atonement he hath appointed, we feel the relentings of a broken heart for all our ingratitude, and the sensations of real grief for all our folly and sin.

Now these experiences, which are the beginning of religion, and which accompany the Christian all his way through life, are the feelings of every good man. There is an entire similarity here. The myriads of sinners who have been saved, from the beginning of time to the present moment, of whatever nation kindred or tongue, have all been inspired with these sentiments, and all been affected with these sensations. If we go back to Patriarchal times, and ask the faithful in those days, what they thought of God and themselves; their answer will correspond exactly with the account we have just given. Good old Jacob will tell us, that when the Lord appeared to him, such an awful reverence of the great God was impressed upon his spirits, as obliged him to cry out, *How dreadful is this place^m!* And will add that when he contemplated his

^m Gen. xxviii. 17.

own nature with the frailty and guilt that attended it, he judged himself *unworthy of the least of God's mercies*^a. With him Job that upright and perfect man will agree, assuring us that having not only heard of the Lord with the hearing of the ear, but with the eye seen him, *he abhorred himself and repented in dust and ashes*^b. Isaiah in after-times, will talk the same language ; *Wo is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips*^c. Daniel in the court of Belshazzar, amidst all the honors conferred on him, will tremble before the great God, and acknowledge that *to him belonged shame and confusion of face*^d. And in just the same temper shall we find the apostles and disciples of Jesus : Peter crying out with an astonishment, the genuine fruit of his humiliation and abasement of heart, *Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man*^e; and the great apostle amidst all his attainments both natural and spiritual, confessing himself the very *chief of sinners*, and freely acknowledging, *By the grace of God I am what I am*^f. In short, this feature I have been describing, is strongly ex-

^a Gen. xxxii. 10.^b Dan. ix. 7.^c 1 Cor. xv. 10.^d Job xlvi. 5, 6.^e Luke v. 8.^f Isa. vi. 5.^g 1 Tim. i. 15.

pressed

pressed in every religious character the scriptures have given us; and fixes an exact resemblance between all the men of God, whose histories are there recorded. Patriarchs prophets and apostles, all unite in loudly adoring the grace of God, and humbly deplored their own unworthiness; in freely renouncing every pretence of merit on their part, and chearfully ascribing their salvation to the divine mercy alone.

And such is the temper of good men of every country, of every age, and of every rank and condition. Princes who fear God we shall see smiting upon their breasts, and with the same lowliness of mind as the meanest publican, crying out, *God be merciful to me a sinner*^u. Neither wit, nor learning, nor honor, nor wealth, nor any other temporal emolument, should they fall to the share of the Christian, will by any means excuse him, nor does he wish they should, from these the genuine expressions of true religion. Such an exact uniformity is there in that divine temper, which possesses the hearts of all the people of God! Nay of their very afflictions themselves, I mean their doubts and fears, and their hours of

^u Luke xviii. 13.

melancholy and desertion, it may with truth be affirmed, that as they are all of much the same kind, so they are all adapted to this the same end, to humble and abase their hearts before God, and to promote their reverence for the divine majesty and glory. This similiarity is likewise farther remarkable,

2. In regard of their hopes and joys; not indeed as to the degree of them, but their nature and tendency. The grand objects of them are the same, such as the pardon of sin, the favor of God, the presence and blessing of his spirit, the guidance and protection of his providence, deliverance from sin with all its wretched consequences, and the perfect fruition of endless happiness in the world above. The source whence they are derived is the same, even the mercy and grace of God through the Lord Jesus Christ. The means by which they are communicated are also the same, the word of God and the other appointments of religion, such as meditation prayer and an attendance on public worship. So likewise the influence by which they are excited is the same, the seasonable and gracious operation of the holy Spirit. And after much the same manner do they take

their

their rise in the heart, usually following upon a deep and humbling sense of their own unworthiness, accompanied perhaps with many doubts and fears, and with many debates and questionings as to their state before God. Thus divine wisdom and grace pursues the same measures with them all, first wounds and then heals, first humbles and then exalts. And in like manner these hopes and joys are every where similar in their nature and tendency. They refresh the hearts and strengthen the hands of all who enjoy them.

Now whoever these happy persons are, whether distinguished by the honors and pleasures, or by the disappointments and sorrows of the present life, it is equally true of them all, that they place a higher value on these divine and heavenly blessings than any other. The good man who is elevated to the very pinnacle of worldly grandeur, if such an one there be, considers the favor of his God as an acquisition infinitely more resplendent and dignifying than all the envied pomp he possesses. And the good man on the other hand, who is reduced to outward circumstances the most abject and distressing, covets these emoluments of a spiritual kind, far beyond all the ease and affluence

affluence of a temporal nature, which providence hath thought fit to deny him. *Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee*^{*}, was the language of a prophet who held no inconsiderable rank in the church of God, when its outward condition was prosperous and flourishing. And it was the prayer of a great and mighty Prince, who had shared largely of the honors of victory, and the gratifications of popular applause, *Lord lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon me*^{*}. Nay, in later times, an apostle who had been bred at the feet of Gamaliel, and could boast perhaps of superior advantages of genius learning and reputation to most others, solemnly declares that he *counted all these things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ his Lord, and as no better than dung*, when compared with the exalted honor and privilege of an interest in his favor and love^{*}.

Thus uniformly do all good men agree in their judgment, as to the refined and satisfying nature of religious pleasures, and thus eagerly do they all thirst after the enjoyment of them; ever cheerful and happy whilst they are in the possession of them, and ever

* Ps. lxxiii. 25.

x — iv. 6.

x Phil. iii. 8.

gloomy

gloomy and disconsolate whilst they are interdicted or withheld. Thus have they all the same refined and exalted taste, and thus are they all, in their measure, alike benefited by the gratification of it; it being the universal and genuine effect of these joys to moderate the affections to the world, to elevate the mind to God, to make the heart courageous in its opposition to sin, and to inspire the whole soul with gratitude and praise. Surely then it may be truly said that they *have all drank into the same spirit.*

And were I here to recite at large the experiences of all the people of God recorded in the bible, those of antient and of later times, those of distinguished and of inferior abilities, those who enjoyed the honors and emoluments of the Jewish dispensation, and those who endured the disgrace and persecution that attended the introduction of the Christian; were I to present to your view an Abraham a Moses and a David, amidst their wealth power and wisdom, and a Peter James and John, amidst their poverty weakness and simplicity; you would find them all giving the same account of the hopes and joys of religion, and all joining issue in this testimony concerning them,

8 iii Phil v. 4 v. x. 23 xxxi 12. that
yours

that the ways of Wisdom are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths peace². And from hence it is natural farther to observe,

3. That there must be the like uniformity, in respect of the pure and spiritual tendency it gives to the desires and affections. If there be such a thing as religion, it is evident to a demonstration, that it can have nothing short of our restoration to the divine likeness for its main object. Since then it is sin which alienates us from God, destroys our peace, lays waste our joys, disgraces our natures, and brings ruin on our souls; this antidote which divine grace hath provided against it, must take effect by gradually expelling the deadly poison from the heart, and so restoring the immortal spirit to a vigorous and healthful state. Nor yet is this malignant disease at once cured: the process is gradual and it may be painful; but there can be no reasonable doubt that in the issue it will be effectual. In the mean while however, it is natural to expect not only the most perfect simplicity in the remedy itself, but likewise an exact similarity in the manner of its operation on every heart, to which by the grace of God it is communicated. Nor is it to be questioned,

² Prov. iii. 17.

could

could we have access to the minds of good men, so as to know distinctly what passes there, but we should find this to be the case.

Large hath been the number of truly pious men who have existed on this earth, though small in comparison with those of the contrary character. But their experiences being laid open to our view, we should at once discern an exact correspondence in the principal characters and leading expressions of them all ; in the fears complaints and conflicts of their breasts, and in the tendencies desires and resolutions of their hearts. How should we find them all, as one man, struggling for the mastery over this and the other corruption, such as pride envy passion impatience sensuality love of the world and the like ! How should we see them all in the bitterness of their spirits bewailing the frowardness of their foolish hearts, and with deep contrition lamenting every little adyantage, which sin may at any time have gained against them ! And how should we hear them all as with one voice, though perhaps interrupted with many broken sighs, pouring out their fervent prayers at the feet of divine mercy, to be delivered from the dominion of their lusts, and to be

formed

formed for the refined and spiritual exercises
of the heavenly world !

It hath often with great truth been ob-
served, that real Christians do in nothing
so exactly agree as in their prayers ; I mean
not in the fervency only, but in the general
drift and tenor of them. Though they
may differ in their apprehensions about some
lesser matters, or may through various
causes misunderstand each others explana-
tion of them ; yet when they present their
addresses to God their common Father, they
all talk one plain simple and intelligible
language. And the reason may be very rea-
dily assigned. Prayer is no other than the
offering our desires to God : it being then
the grand object of every good man's desire
to resemble God, a wish which includes in
it every spiritual and heavenly blessing, it
follows of consequence that there must be
an uniformity in their prayers. This clearly
shews therefore the perfect agreement there is
among them all, in that great and essential
branch of true religion, which we are treat-
ing of under this particular.

And were it necessary we might here, as
well as in the former instances, cite the nu-
merous testimonies of sacred writ in confir-
mation of this pleasing truth : for the ex-
amples

amples of the bible, in all the artless and undisguised forms in which they are drawn out to our view, do no less recommend purity of heart and life, than do its doctrines and precepts. But it will be sufficient to appeal to the sensations of every serious Christian, and to the acknowledgments of even those, who pretend not themselves to that sacred character. Let all then who are in earnest about religion say, whether on the one hand the remains of indwelling sin, that is in other words the irregular tendencies of the heart, are not the principal burden they groan under; and whether on the other hand the prospect of being wholly freed from these sad complaints, and so being assimilated into the spiritual likeness of God, is not the most pleasant cordial which can be administered unto their spirits? To this question they will instantly reply in the affirmative, and I may add will express themselves with a vehemence and chearfulness on this point, which will shew them all to be as it were one soul. And as to those who have no real sense of religion upon their hearts, we shall find even their apprehensions of it, however confined and mistaken in other respects, including in them the general ideas of holiness and goodness:

Such

Such they take to be the meaning of religion, or they could not with any appearance of reason ridicule those, who while they pretend to it are wholly destitute of either of these qualities. So that we have the consent both of good and bad men upon this argument, that if there be such a thing as religion, its tendency to promote holiness must be uniformly the same in all who profess it. And from hence the transition is very natural,

4. To that spirit of real charity and friendship, which is the genuine fruit of evangelical purity. That love must needs enter deeply into the very principles and genius of religion, is methinks sufficiently evident from the nature of God, the great object of it — *God is love*^a; from the unparalleled love of the blessed Jesus, the grand medium of it — *it passeth knowledge*^b; and from the indispensable importance of it to our happiness and usefulness — *it is the bond of perfection*^c, *the fulfilling of the law*^d, the chief attainment of the divine life, and that which reflects the most pleasing lustre on all the other graces and duties of it. Love softens the heart, meliorates the affections, begets

^a John iv. 16.

^b Eph. iii. 19.

^c Col. iii. 14.

^d Rom. xiii. 10.

peace and union in the mind, and diffuses joy and pleasure through it. Love is the main spring of acceptable obedience : it unites us to God, and so conciliates our will to his ; it unites us to one another, and so inclines us to acts of generosity and goodness. It inspires us with benevolent dispositions towards mankind in general, with a tender sympathy towards the distressed, and with a cordial esteem for all good men.

Now this being the case, no man can become a new creature without partaking of this divine temper. It is interwoven with his very nature, and is a feature so fully expressed in the countenance of every branch of this numerous family, that we are warranted to put the trial of our new birth on this issue. Where is the man of religion who is not a lover of God ? who does not admire his transcendent excellencies, as displayed in the various works of his hands ? who does not feel a grateful sense of the rich profusion of goodness, he is continually pouring upon him ? and who does not consider him as his chief portion, and the only source of his most substantial felicity ? Where is the pious soul who is not a lover of the adorable Jesus ? who does not reverence him as the most amiable of all objects, while

by faith he contemplates the unspeakable glories of his divinity, shining through the veil of his humanity ? and who does not feel a pure flame of heavenly affection kindled in his breast towards him, while he dwells on the matchless wonders of that grace, he hath displayed in yielding his life to death for the most unworthy ? And where, in one word, is the good man who is not a lover of good men, whose heart is not susceptible of lively impressions, from a contemplation of the divine image on whatever mind he sees it drawn ; and who is not by this pleasing band of friendship and love, firmly attached to his Christian brother, however despicable he may be in other respects ?

Love then, pure spiritual heavenly love, is an essential property of real religion, necessary to form the character of every good man, and of consequence an endowment common to all the children of God. This was the temper of the Antediluvian saints, of those who flourished under the Jewish dispensation, and of those who sprung into existence amidst the more bright discoveries of the gospel ; the temper of Noah, of David, and of John. It was love that tuned the harp of the sweet singer of Israel, and love that guided the pen of the beloved disciple

disciple of Christ. How does this divine passion towards the blessed God and all who bear his image, diffuse itself through the devout psalms of the one, and the affectionate epistles of the other! What shall I say? Not a Christian breathes, whose heart is untouched with this hallowed fire which comes down from heaven. It communicates itself to every living temple, which the divine Spirit hath consecrated for his residence; and though through various causes the warmth and ardor of it may sometimes abate, it shall not, it cannot be totally extinguished. O happy world where it shall never any more languish; but rising into one bright and pure flame, shall shed light and heat far and wide, and dissolve every heart into gratitude and praise!

Thus have we seen then what are the principal expressions of real religion, wherein good men, however they may be circumstanced in other respects, are universally agreed. *They have been all made to drink into one spirit.* The grace of God first humbles and abases the heart of man; then possesses it of divine hopes and joys; hereby new models and refines its prevailing tendencies and desires; and so makes it capable of what is the perfection of religion, even pure love and exalted friendship.

DISCOURSE III.

PART III.

HAVING described the several leading expressions of religion, which form an exact similarity in the characters of all the people of God, I am now,

III. In a few words, to point out the grounds or reasons of this uniformity, which will serve at once both to confirm the observation in the text, and still farther to elucidate and explain it. And here, amidst the many considerations that might be offered, we shall confine ourselves to those only which are so plain and simple, that they must needs be obvious at first view to every truly serious mind. As first, that the subjects of religion are all of the same nature. Secondly, that they all derive this divine blessing from the same origin. And thirdly,

thirdly, that it is uniformly adapted to the same great and important ends.

1. They are all of the same nature. Were they indeed each a different species of creatures, formed after a different manner, and upon a different foundation as to their acceptance with God; it would follow that there would be a diversity in some of the main expressions of their religion. Faculties essentially varying from each other, would require a various kind of treatment, and he who had preserved his innocence and perfection as in the beginning, would not need that repentance and renovation of heart, which are necessary to the recovery of a guilty and depraved creature. But this is not the case here. We are all made of one blood, all endowed with the like faculties, all possessed of the same passions, and all the unhappy partakers of the same depraved natures. It is acknowledged indeed that there is a strength of genius, and a softness of natural temper in some, which renders them more amiable than others; yet the principal outlines of human apostacy are much the same in all.

From hence therefore it is easy to see, that in respect of the grand concerns of religion, the perceptions and reasonings of every en-

lightned mind, and the sensations and feelings of every renewed heart, must be very nearly similar. The guilty must be humbled, and made truly penitent; the condemned must be justified, and so become in a degree at least chearful and happy; the depraved must be renewed, and as to their prevailing disposition made holy; and they who were at variance with God and one another, must be made capable of divine love and friendship. The former therefore having been the true state of every good man, the latter must of consequence be the sum and substance of the religion of each one of them. And since in every subject of the grace of God, there are thus the same materials to be wrought upon, the same passions and prejudices to be overcome, and the same change to be effected; it follows likewise that this great concern in its rise progress and final consummation, must be conducted in every heart after much the same manner. All which I think fully accounts for that similarity of experience in good men, which hath been so particularly delineated. This inference is likewise with the same force of reason to be drawn from a contemplation,

2. Of the one grand source or origin whence religion is derived. It is from above, the offspring of God, and the genuine fruit of the influence and operation of his spirit. From this one fountain the water of life flows; and how various soever the channels may be through which it runs, the many pure and pleasant streams of it may all be traced back to this their common head. What is affirmed in this context, of the miraculous gifts peculiar to the primitive church, may with the like reason be applied to the better blessings of religion, or of the grace of God, that *the same spirit divideth to every man severally as he will*^e. It is he who irradiates the dark mind, comforts the afflicted heart, new models the perverse will, and sanctifies the polluted affections.

Now as *no fountain can send forth at the same place, sweet water and bitter*^f; so we may be very sure, that what is the effect of a divine influence on the souls of men, must be of the same pure and spiritual nature and tendency. And for the like reason we may safely conclude in the general, that however the circumstances of particular per-

^e 1 Cor. xii. 11.

^f Jam. iii. 11.

sions may in some respects differ, yet the manner of the divine operation on the hearts of men is much the same. Religion will begin then in our humiliation, and advance through various degrees of sanctification, till it rises to a perfection of happiness and glory in the heavenly world. To all which I shall only add,

3. That the great and important ends which religion proposes, clearly evince the simplicity and uniformity of it. The glory of God, our own happiness, and the welfare of society are acknowledged to be the principal objects of this great concern. And if we take our estimate of it by these measures, as we shall hereby be secured from any very gross and absurd apprehensions about it; so we shall be obliged to join issue with the text, in the testimony it gives concerning its sameness. The lines from the circumference to the center, having an immediate direction to that point, must advance towards it in the same manner, and be exactly similar to each other. In like manner there is not one of the particulars in which we have made religion to consist, but will be found on reflection to have the great objects just mentioned immediately in view; nay if either of them be excluded,

excluded, our idea of religion must be imperfect, if not the grand ends of it absolutely defeated. Can the true God be glorified, or his perfections be held in due veneration by him, who in effect exalts himself into a deity, and impiously offers sacrifice to his own merit and sufficiency? Can a man be rationally cheerful and substantially happy, while he stands exposed to the wrath of God, and remains a wretched slave to his lusts? or can the prosperity of particular communities, and the welfare of society in general be maintained and promoted, while the turbulent passions of depraved nature are unrestrained and unsubdued? But on the other hand, how amiable an appearance does true religion make, when unaffected humility, divine hope, pure desire, and fervent love, form the chief expressions of it! These are graces which manifestly tend to exalt the glory of God, and promote the happiness of men. And since there is apparently such an unity of design in this great concern, it necessarily follows that if we are the children of God and the disciples of Jesus, *we have been all made to drink into one spirit.*

Having thus illustrated and confirmed the argument in the text, we shall close what hath

hath been said, with briefly applying it to the uses mentioned in the beginning of this discourse. And,

1. It fully obviates a very popular, and indeed a very plausible objection to the truth of religion. "There are so many different notions and professions in the world, says the man of infidelity, that it is no easy matter to determine which is right. The natural inference therefore from this variety of sentiment is, that all religions are doubtful, and defective of that degree of evidence which is necessary to satisfy an inquisitive mind." But the light in which this matter hath been placed, clearly shews the objection to be fallacious, and the conclusion most irrational and absurd.

That men do reason very differently, and that too upon the essential points of divine revelation, is acknowledged; and that many do make religion to consist in what does not really belong to it, and profess themselves to be what they are not, is likewise as certain. But it does not follow from these abuses of religion, that it is itself a vague loose and uncertain thing. There is but one way to heaven, and however the apprehensions of good men themselves as to

to some lesser things, may not be alike clear, and their external forms of profession may in many respects differ ; yet the leading principles of their judgment, and the main feelings and experiences of their hearts, are strictly analogous and similar. And we may venture to appeal to every one, who hath entered into the spirit of these great and important matters, for the truth of what we have affirmed. Be not shocked therefore at the different appearances religion may assume. They are easily to be accounted for, upon this plain and acknowledged principle, that at present we know but in part and prophecy but in part, and that the best of us are subject to prejudices, which through various causes are almost unconquerable. Religion is however but one thing ; and if you are so happy as really to know and feel what it is, you will have the testimony of all good men, of every age kindred nation and tongue, to join you in your humble and cheerful profession of it. This argument also,

2. Furnishes a powerful motive to the cultivation of intimate union and cordial affection, among all the people of God. Is religion one thing ? Then they who are the partakers of this one common blessing,

sing, should also be the partakers of each other's esteem and love. I mean not from hence to infer the least indifference to any divine truth, which proposes itself to the faith of a Christian. As truth can be but one, so no discovery which infinite wisdom and goodness have thought fit to make, is by any means to be considered as indifferent in itself and of little or no use. Thus to treat any of the sacred doctrines or institutions of the bible, is, in proportion to their importance, to sap the very foundation of that love and union we wish to recommend. That integrity which arises out of the nature of religion, demands a firm and unshaken attachment to whatever appears to be of divine authority. And that pure concern which it excites in the breast, for the glory of God and the good of mankind, not only excuses but warrants a becoming zeal in defence of the truth.

But surely, as we ought all to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints ; so we are obliged by the simplicity and sameness of that divine spirit and temper, which hath been infused into our hearts, most sincerely and affectionately to love one another. If the laws of humanity constrain us to express a tender regard towards mankind

kind in general, purely upon this principle that they partake of the same nature with ourselves ; the argument must receive additional strength, when it comes cloathed with all the native dignity and generosity which religion gives it, at the same time presenting to our view the good man who is born from above, as the object of this our esteem and affection. Can we believe him to be the offspring of God, the brother of Jesus, and a partaker of the same nature with ourselves, and not embrace him with the utmost cordiality in the arms of Christian charity ? God forbid that we should be insensible to such divine impressions ! *Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God ; and every one that loveth, is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not, knoweth not God ; for God is love^g.* May this temper live and increase in each of our hearts, so proving us to be the disciples of Jesus ; till at length it shall arrive at its utmost perfection, in the realms of light and glory above !

^g 1 John iv. 7, 8.

DISCOURSE



DISCOURSE IV.

The Importance of Religion.

PART I.

LUKE X. 42.

— One thing is needful. —

THAT Religion is a concern of infinite importance to mankind, every one will acknowledge who admits that there really is such a thing. And yet alas! there are few only who have a deep operative abiding sense of this impressed upon their hearts. To excite therefore your attention to this one grand

grand concern, and by the grace of God to persuade you to a vigorous and persevering pursuit of it, is the object of this discourse. Nor can, methinks, any one among us turn a deaf ear to this argument, while he duly reflects, that it is not only the most interesting which was ever proposed to his attention, but that it stands thus distinguished in our text, by the decisive sentence of the Son of God himself.

What led our Saviour to discourse on this subject, is particularly mentioned in the preceding verses. Entering it seems into a certain village, he was invited to the house of a woman named Martha, who had a sister called Mary. This village it is highly probable was Bethany, a place not far from Jerusalem; and these two women, the same of whom the Evangelist John speaks^h, and whose brother Lazarus had been raised from the dead. They appear both of them to have been the friends of Jesus and of religion; though in the course of the story the preference in regard of piety, is manifestly given to Mary above Martha.

As to Mary, she sat at the feet of Jesus, and heard his wordⁱ. Her attention was almost wholly taken up with the things of God; so

^h John xi.ⁱ Ver. 39.

that she gladly embraced every opportunity of hearing our Saviour's doctrine, and profiting by his instructions. But as to Martha, she was cumbered about much serving^k. Indeed her much serving was the effect of her hospitality, and an expression of her love to Christ, and was therefore in these views of it highly commendable. But her active and impetuous temper had hurried her into too great anxiety about worldly things, and so was likely to prove hurtful to her best interests. Yea one ill effect of it remarkably appeared, in the indecent fretfulness she betrayed on the present occasion. For in the midst of her busy care to provide for our Saviour's entertainment, observing her sister wholly taken up with his company and conversation, she petulantly complains of her inattention to the affairs of the family, and prays that she might be dismissed to assist her therein. To which our Lord immediately makes answer in the verse preceding the text; "*Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things. The anxiety you express upon this occasion is unbecoming and sinful. How fond soever you may be of shewing me respect, yet there is a mixture of vanity*"

^k John xi. 40.

“ with your hospitality, and of worldly-mindedness with your care and industry.
“ You are too busy about these matters.
“ The affairs of your family though they
“ ought to be prudently attended to, yet
“ should not shut out the grand concern of
“ God and religion. This is *the one thing*
“ *needful*. Be persuaded therefore to transfer your needless anxieties from these
“ many trifling matters, to that which is
“ of indispensable importance. There is a
“ necessity of one thing¹. And instead of
“ censuring your sister Mary as if she were
“ too religious, rather consider her conduct as a proper pattern for your imitation; for she *bath chosen that good part*,
“ *which shall not be taken away from her.*”

And now, methinks, little pains need be taken to prove, that this reproof of our Saviour's is of more general use than in the particular instance before us, and that he himself so designed it. Dismissing therefore any farther concern with Martha, let us consider this most important and salutary admonition as addressed immediately to ourselves. There is a strong propensity in each of us to an undue solicitude about the affairs of

¹ Εγώ δέ εἰς χρήσια.

the

the present life. But what says Christ to us amidst all our vain pursuits? — “ Be not careful and troubled about these many things. There is need of one thing only: let that therefore be the main object of your attention.”

If it be asked what this one thing is? the answer is ready, it is Religion, or a principle of divine life implanted in the heart by the grace of God; the main expressions of which are faith in Christ, and repentance towards God. By the prophets it is usually stiled *the fear of the Lord*^m, and *a new heart*ⁿ; and by the apostles, *the new creature*^o, *the incorruptible seed*^p, and *the wisdom that is from above*^q. It includes in it an interest in the mediation of Christ and all the blessings of salvation, as its privilege; and the right government of the temper and life, as its duty. My present design is not to enter into a particular explanation of the nature of religion, that having been attempted already; but to confine myself entirely to the importance of it. It is of all things most necessary, and that without which we cannot fail of being exposed to

^m Jer. xxxiii. 40, &c.

ⁿ Ezek. xviii. 31.

^o 2 Cor. v. 17. Gal. vi. 15.

^p 1 John iii. 9. 1 Pet.

^q Jam. iii. 17.

i. 23.

the utmost misery and danger. In order therefore to set this argument in the strongest light, we shall,

- I. Compare the one thing needful with the many other things of the present life, about which we are apt to be careful and troubled ;
- II. Shew more directly wherein the importance of it consists ; and then,
- III. Confirm this view of it by some plain reflections on the nature of religion, as it hath been already in general explained.

I. If we compare serious religion with the most important and interesting concerns of human life, it will clearly appear to have the precedence of them all. Knowledge reputation friendship subsistence and health, will I imagine include in them every thing, which mankind hath been used to account needful.

I. *Knowledge* we will mention first, as it is what men in general deem the least necessary, though it be an excellent accomplishment, and in some respects superior to any of the blessings just mentioned.

An acquaintance with human nature, with the history of the world, with the various interests of mankind, and with the connections and dependencies of all things around us, is a very desirable attainment. Nor is the utility of it inconsiderable, since it not only affords a rational pleasure to the mind, but is of great importance to direct our conduct in most of the affairs of life. So that we are highly indebted to those who, at the expence of much time and unwearied labor, have generously contributed to the interests of learning and knowledge,

But notwithstanding this, human science, whatever be the benefits resulting from it, cannot be styled the one thing needful; no not absolutely so, even in regard of our well-being in the present life. A man may be wholly rude and uncultivated as to any accomplishment of this sort, and yet be both a good and a happy man, an useful member of society, and a joyful expectant of future felicity and glory. Not a few instances of this sort we have frequently before our eyes. Nay it is possible, and it too often happens, that persons of distinguished abilities and of extraordinary attainments in respect of these things, may be destitute not only of the grace of God, but of a common

principle of honesty ; and so be rather the enemies than the friends of mankind, the pests rather than the ornaments of society, and instruments of the greatest evil, rather than of any good to their fellow creatures. Human knowledge therefore, however useful, is not so necessary but it may be dispensed with, especially when laid in the balance with the grand concerns of religion. Whatever rational pleasure it may afford the mind, it will not give peace to the conscience. However it may direct our conduct in the civil affairs of life, it will not guide our feet to heaven. And though it may secure us from many temporary evils and inconveniences, it will not effectually give us the conquest over ourselves, and make us meet for a better world.

2. *Reputation* is a desirable blessing ; and when considered in reference to probity and virtue, is certainly of far greater importance to our happiness, even in the present life, than the most considerable improvements in human science. It is natural for men to wish to please. A generous mind feels a satisfaction in being approved by the wise and good. But this passion, carried beyond its due bounds, hurries men into an immoderate and sinful pursuit of honor and applause ;

plause ; and that oft-times upon the footing not of real but of supposed merit. To be elevated above the common level of mankind, and to be deemed great prudent and honourable by the men of the world, this too many account their chief happiness, and eagerly grasp at, as the one thing needful.

But alas ! how sad the deception ! what vain shadows ! what empty bubbles are all the honors of this transitory world ! They will not satisfy an immortal mind ; nor will they always add ease and security to our outward circumstances. So far from it, that they frequently prove the occasions of many anxious cares and restless disappointments. Yea even the just respect and esteem of his fellow creatures, is not essentially necessary to a man's real felicity ; nor will it certainly secure him from the many other evils of human life, to which he stands exposed in common with the rest of mankind. And however a good name, or a character for sobriety and integrity, is better than precious ointment, and far more fragrant to a virtuous mind than the sweetest perfumes to the senses ; yet it is not the one thing needful. This invaluable blessing a man may fully possess, and yet on many accounts be ex-

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tremely unhappy. And though on the other hand it be invidiously and cruelly denied him, yet he may enjoy the most agreeable peace and composure within. But if neither knowledge nor reputation come within this description ; may it not be applied,

3. To *Friendship* ? I had almost said, Yes. For so inestimable is the blessing, that it is hardly possible to exceed in the commendation of it. It is one of the chief felicities of the present life. We were made for society. We could not live without it. The happiness of heaven consists in the perfection of it. Friendship is a firm barrier against many of the evils and dangers of life ; a reviving cordial to the heart amidst most of the sorrows and afflictions of it ; and that fruit of heavenly growth, which adds a rich flavor to all our other enjoyments. The advantages of counsel and reproof, of assistance and sympathy which arise out of it, cannot fail of endearing it to every thoughtful and prudent mind. He therefore who hath a wise affectionate and faithful friend, may be justly deemed the favourite of providence : and though he ranks with the lowest class of mankind, yet (so rarely is true friendship to be found !) he stands distinguished

distinguished in point of happiness, above many who shine in all the pomp and splendor of human greatness.

But after all, this is not the one thing needful — not so needful as to be of the highest moment. Our friends however dear to us, may deceive or forsake us, or by death be forced from our embraces. Some amidst a swarm of friends have been miserable. Yea it is often beyond the power of friendship, to succour and relieve us in outward extremity; and much more so to speak peace and joy effectually to our hearts, when bowed down with religious grief and melancholy. Whereas on the other hand, there have been those, who though deprived of all agreeable connections on earth, yet have enjoyed the most peaceful security and the most enlivening pleasures, under the shadow of his wings who is friendship itself. This blessing then, excellent and desirable as it is, is not the one thing needful. However,

4. Most are agreed in thus representing a man's *Subsistence*, maintenance or livelihood. Hence food and raiment are usually stiled the necessities of life. And such they certainly are: we cannot live, we cannot subsist without them. A thousand other things might be dispensed with as superfluities,

ties, or to say the best of them, the agreeable accommodations of the present state. But these are strictly speaking needful: and our Saviour himself admits that they are so, when, discoursing to his disciples of these matters, he tells them, *Your heavenly Father knoweth that you have need of them*¹. A care therefore to provide a comfortable support for ourselves and our families, is not only allowable, but our incumbent duty. Yea so far is religion from countenancing sloth, under the pretext of indifference about worldly affairs, that it assures us, the man of this character *bath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel*².

Nevertheless the importance of these things is only comparative, and they take their denomination as needful, merely from their reference to our existence in the present world. They are necessary, as animal life cannot ordinarily be maintained and upheld without them: but they are not necessary to the existence and well-being of our souls, or to our future and everlasting felicity. We may be poor destitute and miserable, in regard of our outward circumstances, and yet possess the best riches. Our bodies may be cloathed in rags, and yet our

¹ Matth. vi. 32.

² 1 Tim. v. 8.

souls

souls arrayed in heavenly attire. Our natures may faint and die away for want of common sustenance, and yet our immortal spirits be fed with living bread. Lazarus was denied not only the dainties of the rich man's table, but the crumbs that fell from it ; yet Lazarus possessed the one thing needful. And the same may be said,

5. And lastly, as to *Health*. This every one will acknowledge an important blessing — so important, that no other enjoyment of life can be properly relished without it. What are all the profits honors and pleasures of the world, to a man languishing of a mortal disease, worn out by racking pains, or pining away with loathing sickness ? He is absolutely incapacitated for the pursuits of life, and totally indisposed to them. Wisdom and knowledge, reputation and friendship avail him little ; yea food itself, the most needful thing in life, however elegantly served up, is nauseous to his taste. Health therefore cannot but claim the preference to every other outward good.

Yet even this is not the one thing needful, in the sense of our text. The health of the soul is of infinitely greater moment than that of the body. This must die, but that must live for ever. And how sad to see
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the one arrayed in all the bloom and verdure of youth, exulting in the possession of ease vigor and strength, while the other is deformed enervated and ruined by sin, growing up to death and destruction, and ripening for everlasting vengeance and misery! And on the other hand, how pleasing to congratulate the Christian, as the apostle John did Gaius^t, on the health and prosperity of his soul; while his outward frame, amidst the increasing languors of age or sickness, is making speedy advances towards its final dissolution!

Thus neither knowledge, nor reputation, nor friendship, nor subsistence, nor health, however excellent useful or important in themselves, are of like moment with the great and inestimable blessing of real religion. This demands the precedence of them all, and is in the estimation of wisdom itself, *The one thing needful*. From this comparative view of it, let us then proceed,

II. To inquire more directly wherein the importance of it doth consist.

Now that surely will be deemed most important, which enters into the essence of

our happiness, which takes in the whole compass of our interests both natural and spiritual, which hath respect both to body and soul, and which extends its influence through time into eternity. And such is the nature of religion. O that men did but believe it! O that by the grace of God they were persuaded to make trial of it! Here then we might take a view of the many advantages, which attend the experience and practice of religion in the present life, and in that which is to come; and shew how admirably it is adapted to promote the real interests of persons of every age, in every relation, and in every condition.

I might discourse of its utility to the young; to check the violence of their passions, to restrain their inordinate desires, to regulate their aims and pursuits, to fortify them against the snares of life, to animate them to the duties of it, to infuse a sweetness into the enjoyments of it, and to add a real beauty to their character and deportment in the view of all. —— I might represent the importance of it to persons of riper years; to qualify them for the various services to which providence calls them, to direct them in emergencies of the most critical

tical and trying nature, to hold them steady to their best interests in seasons of imminent temptation and danger, and to render them both respectable and useful in their day and generation. — And hence I might go on to a description of the many blessings it pours upon the hoary head ; what cheerfulness it spreads over the countenance, when the vigor and sprightliness of youth abates ; what firm support it yields the heart, when the animal spirits are almost dissolved and broken by the infirmities of nature ; and what weight it adds to the instructions and counsels then given, when the capacity and judgment of former years are in other respects greatly on the decline.

I might farther enlarge on the importance of it to persons in every relation of life ; to magistrates and to subjects, to masters and to servants, to parents and to children, to brethren, to friends, and to neighbours : how needful to teach men their duty, to animate them to it, and to assist them in it.

From hence I might go on to represent the advantages resulting from it to persons in every condition, in prosperity, when the world smiles upon them, and they have an affluence of all outward good ; to secure their

their hearts from an immoderate fondness for present enjoyments, to inspire their breasts with thankfulness, and to dispose them to usefulness : and in adversity, when providence frowns on them, and they are encompassed on every side with perplexity sorrow and trouble, to reconcile them to the will of God, to alleviate their affliction, and to render it subservient to their real advantage.

In like manner I might proceed to shew you how needful true religion is in a time of sickness and death, when all the scenes of life are passing away from before our eyes, when the king of terrors is nearly approaching, and when eternity with all its awful realities is immediately in our view ; how needful it is then to banish fear from our hearts, to reconcile us to that most certain event, and to diffuse serenity and joy through our minds, when nature itself is dissolving and dying away.

In a word, to finish the scene, I might represent to you the never-fading honors, and immortal pleasures of the heavenly world ; the large and fair inheritance there provided for the sons of God, the crowns of glory which shall be placed on their heads, the palms of victory which shall be put into their hands, the robes of joy and gladness

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they shall wear, and the rest the happiness
and renown they shall possess to all eternity.
But however instructive and animating these
subjects are, I forbear at present to enlarge
any farther upon them.

DISCOURSE IV.

PART II.

MY design is now to evince the importance of real religion, from a contemplation of the misery and danger to which the want of it necessarily exposes us. And if it can be made appear, that without it we lie open to the greatest evils in life—to the utmost anguish in death—and to the wrath of God in the world to come; it will, it must be acknowledged, that it is *the one thing needful*. Here then we will,

FIRST, Take a survey of the unhappy condition of a man void of religion in the present life. To this end let us view him on the one hand triumphing in prosperity, and on the other laden with adversity: events these which are alike common both

to the good and the bad. And since it is from them we usually take our measures of human happiness or misery, a consideration of his behaviour, in both these circumstances, will give us the most striking idea of the necessity and importance of true religion.

1. Let *Prosperity* then, first of all, be the dress we view him in. His worldly schemes succeed to his wishes. He grows great rich and honourable. He hath large treasures, wide extended possessions, numerous friends and dependants, and an affluence of all outward good. His wealth entitles him not to power and dignity only, but to all the delights and gratifications of sense. He flourisheth like a green bay-tree, his eyes stand out with fatness, and he hath more than heart can wish^u. And now will you say that this man is happy, that his wealth secures him from danger, and that, being thus exalted to the pinnacle of honor and pleasure, he is beyond the reach of misery? O no! Being at enmity with God and religion, his blessings become curses to him; his prosperity makes him only a broader mark for temptation, and so in the end capable of the greater misery.

^u Ps. xxxvii. 35.—lxxiii. 7.

Turn your eye from all this glare of external pomp and gaiety to his heart, and you will find him rather an object of pity than of envy. There reign the depraved passions of human nature invested with sovereign power, and confirmed therein by every accession of worldly good. He is full, and takes the name of God in vain. He hath every thing, and yet truly enjoys nothing. He abounds, and yet is not content. To his lusts he yields, and yet his lusts are not satisfied. His riches make him poor, because they only increase his desires. His pleasures cease to be pleasures, through satiety and want of variety. The passions of pride jealousy discontent and desire, are all irritated and inflamed by his successes. New temptations lead him captive into new sins. Guilt accumulates on his conscience. His dislike of every thing that is serious increases. He would fain persuade himself to be an infidel. The evil day he puts afar off. God he hates — the world he loves — death he fears — and his own soul he destroys for ever.

Is not then the condition of this man, amidst all his boasted enjoyments, very deplorable? Possessing more than the necessities of life, even its joys and pleasures, he

is miserable. And why? Because he has not *the one thing needful*, lives without God in the world, and is a slave to sin and sense. If this be the case, and let experience and observation decide the point, of what infinite importance is religion! How needful this one thing to enable us to enjoy life, and to prevent our being ruined by it! to moderate our affections to the world, and so secure us from falling a sacrifice to it! to keep us in the day of temptation, and to make us more than conquerors, when all the powers of earth and hell threaten our destruction!

Having thus beheld the man of this world, arrayed in all the gaiety and splendor of outward prosperity; let us now reverse the scene, and view him plunged in the depths,

2. Of *Adversity*; for adversity is sometimes the lot of bad as well as good men. We will suppose him then stript of the profits honors and pleasures of life, entangled with the difficulties and disappointments of it, reduced to poverty and want, laden with disgrace and contempt, languishing of the pains and weaknesses of declining nature, and to complete the scene, treated with coldness and neglect by his best friends,

and utterly forsaken and abandoned by the rest. To all these calamities, or at least to one or other of them, we will I say suppose him subjected. Now in these circumstances, how does he behave? how does he support himself? what considerations is he possessed of to calm his mind, and fortify his heart? It is possible indeed that firmness of animal spirits, or ambition to be thought superior to the misfortunes of life, may in some degree suppress or stifle the feelings of nature, and enable him to assume an appearance somewhat brave and steady. But being destitute of any just sense of religion, how is it possible he should enjoy that real inward serenity, and that rational uniform patience and resolution, which the faith of God, of his providence, and a better world inspires?

On the contrary, the fear of God being far removed from his eyes, and the hope of the gospel having no firm hold on his heart, we shall rather hear him affronting God with the most indecent reflections on his dispensations, or else just expiring under the insupportable weight of his sorrows. And in these sad circumstances, how much is the man of this world to be pitied! He has no God to fly to—no providence to confide

in—no Saviour to pity him—no divine aids to assist and strengthen him—no promise of better blessings to secure him from despondency—nor the least hope of future happiness and glory to soothe his tempestuous passions, or to administer joy and gladness to his heart. Most men seem to think religion needful at such a time. And indeed if there were no truth in it, yet the firm persuasion of it would be extremely eligible, when in these circumstances ; as it so much tends to quiet the troubled breast, and to reconcile it to events which are necessary and unavoidable. A man overwhelmed with outward trouble, and in the midst of this thick and dark tempest without one ray of hope as to a future state, must of all men be most miserable. Such the Apostles acknowledge *they* should have been, had they remained strangers to the animating prospects of a better world which Christianity affords.

Religion then is most certainly the one thing needful, as the want of it exposes men to the greatest danger in a time of *prosperity*, and adds infinitely to their distress in that of *adversity*. And from this view of things, we may easily judge how it may be with such persons, in every condition circumstance and relation

relation of life. Their hearts not being principled with the grace of God, they can have nothing to preserve the balance in their minds ; but must on every occasion be subject to a hurtful, if not painful fluctuation of the passions. They can have nothing to ward off the many dangers continually flying around them ; but must lie at the mercy of every resolute temptation which assaults them. But allowing the man of this world every perquisite of happiness, which can be supposed to fall to his share, or indeed which the delights and pleasures of sense can possibly afford ; yet,

SECONDLY, He must die ; and being at enmity with religion, how deplorable must his condition be in that critical, that trying hour ! It is dreadful indeed to describe to you the countenance, the expressions, the feelings of a dying sinner. Many I am sensible there are, who pass out of life in a hardened and thoughtless manner : but the reverse is perhaps most commonly the case. And where the mind is capable of reflection and prospect, and especially where the conscience is thoroughly awake ; how pungent must be the distress, how bitter the agony of the soul !

Some of us, it may be, have stood by the bed of a departing sinner, have the dreadful image still before our eyes, and the sad accents still sounding in our ears. " Every earthly scene is passing away, the bonds of nature are just dissolving, and as to this world, to which I have sacrificed my heart my hopes my all, I am no more. With you, my friends, my possessions, my honors, my sensual gratifications, yea every thing that is dear to me, I must now part; part with you, never—never to enjoy you any more! And what have I before me? All is dark and gloomy, I dare not hope for heaven, for I am yet in my sins. Or if I could suppose it were possible I might possess it, yet I cannot wish for it. It is a holy place, and so perverse is this heart of mine, that though I leave what is mortal behind me, I cannot think of being happy there. O sad! as I am, thus incapable of happiness! Nay my conscience tells me I am justly doomed to misery — an alien from God — an enemy to him, — a rebel against him! His mercies I have abused, his warnings I have slighted, his grace I have affronted and despised; and now, I am undone—undone for ever." What distracting,

tracting, what horrible language this! *The spirit of a man may bear his infirmities, but a wounded spirit who can bear?*^w *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*^x *Who knoweth the power of his anger? even as is his fear, so is his wrath.*^y How lamentable a sight this!—a soul perishing in its sins! See! the pale countenance, the cold sweat, the faultring lips! Nature dissolves — every surrounding object vanishes—and the eyes swim in death. The curtain of humanity falls, and upon the naked helpless soul eternity at once pours all its tremendous realities. Say then, is not religion, in these moments at least, *the one thing needful?* Surely it is. But if you still doubt the truth of what I say, ask those who having death and eternity immediately in their view, are best capable of resolving this interesting question; and they will acknowledge, I had almost said to a man, its vast importance.

But the importance of it is chiefly to be estimated, by the reference it hath to a future state. Which leads me now,

THIRDLY, To describe to you, or at least to attempt a description of the great

^w Prov. xviii. 14.

^x Heb. x. 31.

^y Ps. xc. 11.

loss

loss which he sustains who dies a stranger to God and religion, and the infinite miseries which are the lot of the impenitent and ungodly. Scripture assures us, that except *a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God*^z: and that *the wicked shall go away into everlasting punishment*^z. Now by these declarations it clearly appears,

1. That he who passes out of life in an unrenewed state, is for ever excluded the heavenly world. A consideration this which, methinks, upon the most general view of it, reflects an amazing importance on religion. But how does the importance of it magnify in proportion to the clearness and brightness of our views of that blissful state! And yet, since our most exalted ideas of it are inadequate and imperfect, the greatness of the loss cannot be fully ascertained in the present life. Let us however for a moment attempt to follow him, who was *caught up into paradise*, and there heard and saw *things that are unutterable*^b; —to follow him thither in our meditations, that we may there learn how needful this one thing is, without which we can never have admission to that world, or if we could, could never enjoy it.

^a John iii. 3.

^b 2 Cor. xii. 4.

^a Mat. xxv. 46.

“ Tell us then, O ye happy spirits, who
“ are already in possession of heaven, what
“ are your natures, what your capacities,
“ what your pleasures, and what your em-
“ ployments. In heaven, that immeasur-
“ able space of light perfection and glory,
“ ye dwell. Your immortal spirits, refined
“ from all the dross of ignorance sin and
“ sense, are exalted to the utmost pitch of
“ vigor purity and joy. With myriads of
“ perfect beings, all formed for friendship
“ and love, you for ever associate. The
“ divine Jesus, who the other day yielded
“ his life unto death for your sakes, deigns
“ himself and in your own nature to dwell
“ among you, to converse with you, and
“ to lay open his heart to your view. Yea
“ the blessed God, arrayed in all the charms
“ of infinite love, as well as in all the
“ splendor of ineffable glory, condescends
“ to reveal himself to you, and to shed on
“ you the richest blessings of his bounty
“ and goodness. O ! the pure the substan-
“ tial the growing pleasures you enjoy,
“ while you behold his face in righteous-
“ ness, and feel yourselves transformed in-
“ to his perfect likeness ! while you con-
“ template his excellencies, sing his praises,
“ and never cease to do his will ! Yours is

“ the distinguished honor to be kings and
 “ priests unto God^c, to sit with Jesus in his
 “ throne, and to minister to him in his
 “ temple above. Yours is the exalted pri-
 “ vilege to possess *an inheritance which is*
 “ *incorruptible undefiled and which fadeth*
 “ *not away^d*, and a far more exceeding and
 “ *eternal weight of glory^e*. And yours is
 “ the refined bliss to feed on heavenly joys,
 “ and to drink of rivers of pleasure, which
 “ run at the right-hand of God for ever-
 “ more.” But I forbear —

How vain the attempt to describe the glories of that world ! Our sight is too weak to sustain a vision so bright and splendid. Till therefore we arrive at heaven, we must be content with little more than being assured, that *eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor heart conceived what it is^f*. Yet by this distant and confused view of it, we clearly discern that the loss, whoever suffers it, must be immense, since there are no human measures by which we can fully take account of it. Of what infinite moment then is this *one thing needful* ! But this is not

^e Rev. i. 6.^c 2 Cor. iv. 17.^d 1 Pet. i. 4.^f 1 Cor. ii. 9.

all, its importance is still farther heightened and increased by a view,

2. Of the misery to be endured, as well as the loss sustained by the impenitent and ungodly. *These shall go away*, says he who shall be judge on that great occasion, *into everlasting punishment*⁵. And what is that punishment? Adequate conceptions of it we cannot frame, any more than of the happiness we have been contemplating. Yet scripture presents us with such a scene, as may justly make the heart of a sinner tremble, and convince him that there is the most indispensable necessity in religion. If to be deprived of all the boasted acquisitions and enjoyments of the present life; if to be abandoned to the rage of fierce and ungovernable passions, without feeling even the little transient pleasure which results from the gratification of them; if to endure the acute and unremitting pains of a conscience pierced and torn asunder with guilt and fear; if to be cast out of the presence of God in the character of a friend, and yet to have him ever before the eye as a justly incensed and irreconcileable enemy; if to bear the weight of his indignation, without any support under

⁵ Mat. xxiv. 46.

it, or any mitigation of it; and if, in one word, amidst all to have no hope of deliverance; if this be misery, such scripture assures us is the portion appointed the wicked. *To them that obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness, even to every soul of man which doth evil, he will render indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish^b.* And they who know not God, and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his powerⁱ.

It is an unpleasant, and I am sensible an unthankful office to lead you, sinner, down into the regions of the damned, and to shew you the mansions where dwell spirits of the like impure fierce and diabolical passions with yourself; but the sad the tremendous necessity of which the text speaks, obliges me. The compassionate Jesus himself, who came on the kind and generous design of saving both soul and body, hath bid you *fear him, who can destroy the one and the other in hell^k.* And while he hath directed the views of his faithful disciples to the fair and pleasant fields of paradise above, describing them in all their beauty verdure and glory; he hath set be-

^a Rom. ii. 6, 8, 9.

^{i 2} Theff. i. 8, 9.

^k Matth. x. 28.

fore

fore your eyes a scene, which though figurative is expressive of real and intense misery, even *the pit that bath no bottom*¹, *the worm that never dieth*^m, *outer darkness*ⁿ, and *fire unquenchable*^o. O ! who can tell what are the terrors of the second death ? or describe what is meant by the *power of his anger*^p who is a *consuming fire*^q; and by *the wrath*, not of the Lion only, but of the abused and provoked *Lamb*^r? Enough however we know of it, even from this general representation, to put an infinite importance into the one grand concern recommended in our text.

¹ Rev. ix. 1, &c.

^m Mark ix. 44.

ⁿ Matth. viii. 12.

^o Mark ix. 44.

^p Ps. xc. 11.

^q Heb. xii. 29.

^r Rev. vi. 16.

DISCOURSE

DISCOURSE IV.

PART III.

AFTER what hath been said, one should suppose there need be nothing farther added, to confirm the argument under consideration. And yet,

III. There are some collateral proofs or illustrations of the infinite importance of religion, which, though I shall not particularly enlarge on them, must not be omitted. Let us then,

I. Consider who is the great object and author of religion. It is the blessed God. A Being who possesses all greatness and excellence in their highest perfection : who hath all imaginable charms of beauty and goodness, to attract our esteem and love : whose regard to justice truth and holiness are firm and invariable : and whose power is equal to

to his most tender compassions, and his most righteous resentments. O who can describe the majesty and glory of God ? He is incomprehensible immense and eternal. Heaven is his throne and the earth his footstool. Myriads of pure and perfect spirits are his intimate friends and immediate attendants. All the powers of nature are subject to his controul, and all the infinitely numerous and complicated affairs of the universe, are directed and governed by one act of his will. In a word ; when we have attentively contemplated God in all the works of his hands, have given our imagination leave to wander beyond the boundaries of sense into the other world, and have exerted the utmost powers of reason and faith in the search of him ; how small a part of his ways do we understand ? *Who can by searching find out God ? who can find out the Almighty to perfection ?* And now amidst the splendors of this great and glorious Being, what amazing dignity and importance are reflected upon religion, which hath the ONE ETERNAL GOD for its grand object ? A general idea of the beauty variety and use of the works of nature, gives a pleasing and vene-

* Job xi. 7.

rable sanction to the profession of the philosopher, whose business it is to lay open these scenes of wonder to our view. But what infinitely greater importance is stampt upon religion, by a general idea of God himself; since its professed business is, to lead us beyond these stupendous effects of wisdom and power, into an acquaintance with the great Author of them all?

2. From the nature and value of the soul, which is the proper seat of its residence, we may also farther infer the infinite utility and importance of religion. How curiously is the soul of man framed! It is a rational intelligent spirit, endowed with the powers of perception judgment reflection and consciousness; with a will to impel us to action; and with numerous affections to facilitate our actions, and to give them each its proper denomination as either good or bad. Now, however these faculties are employed, it is evident from the nature of the soul itself, and from the restlessness and disappointment which attend all worldly and sensual pursuits, that the end for which it was originally formed is not, cannot be attained, unless religion be its object. How ignoble is the appearance which the immortal spirit makes, while held under the abject and

cruel dominion of bodily appetites and affections, and while drudging on in the paths of ignorance sin and wretchedness ! But what dignity beauty and glory does it assume, when it is delivered by the grace of God from this sad captivity, is refined from the gross impurities of sin and sense, is enlightened with divine knowledge, is fired with truly noble and exalted prospects, and is quickened to the most rational spiritual and heavenly pursuits ! From the nature therefore and capacities of the soul, of which some judgment is to be formed even in this its depraved and apostate state, the indispensable importance of true religion may be clearly inferred. It is also farther to be considered,

3. That religion extends its influence to a future and eternal world. It is not a concern of the present life only, as we have already seen, but hath respect to an endless duration in another state. ETERNITY ! — We are absorbed, swallowed up, lost in the idea. If it is a consideration which adds great weight to any worldly affair, that it is likely to affect our happiness many years to come ; how weighty, how important a matter must religion be ! When millions of years have rolled around, the immortal spirit will be

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but beginning in its existence. And upon this great question, whether we are interested in Christ, are born again, and have entered into the spirit of real religion, will turn the happiness or misery of our future and everlasting condition. “The eternal salvation of one soul, says an ingenious and pious writer*, is of greater importance, and big with greater events than the temporal salvation of an whole kingdom, though it were for the space of ten thousand ages; because there will come up a point, an instant in eternity, when that one soul shall have existed as many ages as all the individuals of an whole kingdom, ranged in close succession, will in the whole have existed in ten thousand ages. Therefore one soul is capable of a larger share of happiness or misery throughout an endless duration (for that will be before it still) than an whole kingdom is capable of in ten thousand ages.” *What, O what then, will it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?* But what tends to fix upon the mind such a reverence for the one thing needful, as is never—never to be obliterated, is,

* Dr. Doddridge.

¹ Matth. xvi. 26.

4. And

4. And lastly, That it owes its existence, with all the comforts and powers of it in this life, and all the joys and triumphs of it in another, to the humiliation and death of the Son of God. Behold the supreme Majesty of heaven *tabernacling among men*^u; him in whom dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily^w, and who thought it no robbery to be equal with God, bumbling himself and becoming obedient to death, even the death of the cross^x: and all this with a view, to repair the injuries which sin had offered to the divine government, to make way for the return of the blessed Spirit to the temple he had forsaken, and so again to possess it of this heavenly blessing of which I have been discoursing. Behold, I say, this unfathomable condescension of divine goodness on the one hand; and the stupendous expressions of majesty and glory attending it, in the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, on the other: and then say whether there is not an importance in religion which infinitely exceeds, not only all human measures, but those by which the most exalted seraph about the throne of God, is used to compute. The groans of the expiring Saviour, the victory he obtained over the powers of darkness, the

^u John i. 1, 14.

^w Col. ii. 9.

^x Philip. iii. 6, 8.

joys of heaven upon his return thither, and the descent of his Spirit to our earth ; all proclaim with a loud voice this grand essential and most interesting truth—That religion is *the one thing needful*. In short, when we have said that it exists and lives through the death and mediation of the Son of God, we have said the utmost which can be imagined by a finite mind to reflect an importance and solemnity, as well as a beauty and glory on this great concern. But I forbear to enlarge here, leaving each one amidst this scene of wonders to his own contemplations.

The subject however of the necessity of religion must not be dismissed, without a word or two by way of improvement.

1. How astonishing is the infatuation of mankind in general, that they concern themselves so little about an affair of so interesting a nature ! The fact is too true to be disputed. Look where we will, we see men with the greatest eagerness pursuing their worldly advantage. Either the riches the honors or the pleasures of the present life, are with them the one thing needful. So they consider these temporary and unsatisfying enjoyments, amidst all the plain evidence they daily have before their eyes of their wretched mistake ;

mistake ; and even amidst the convincing proofs which sometimes strike their consciences, of the truth and importance of religion. But how sad a reflection this on all their boasted wisdom and prudence ! It hath ever been a maxim, admitted even by those who have the slenderest pretences to wisdom, that what is of the greatest moment should be first and chiefly attended to. But how egregiously do these men of wisdom contradict the very maxim, by which they would be thought to govern their conduct ! Religion, which is confessedly the most important concern, is treated with the utmost indifference and neglect. How justly then does such a behaviour merit the description of madness and folly, which the bible every where gives it !

And how affecting a proof doth this furnish of the degeneracy of human nature ! Can it be questioned that sin hath drawn a vail of darkness over the minds of men, and that it hath brought a disease of the most fatal tendency upon their hearts ? It is impossible, methinks, for any one to sit down and seriously consider this mournful fact, without acknowledging that the whole world is apostatized from God, and sunk into guilt and misery. Convinced however,

as the Christian is, of the reality and importance of religion, it would argue a strange kind of insensibility in him, were he not,

2. With earnestness and affection to exhort men to a serious attention to it. So Jesus and his apostles did, so we are commanded to do, and while we do it, have the dictates of found wisdom on our side, as sufficiently appears from what hath been already said. They who have been made sensible of the value of their own souls, and have entered into the spirit of those great things of which we have been treating; cannot but feel a concern for the welfare of others. And how natural to express this concern for our acquaintance friends and relations, by our tears expostulations and prayers !

Supposing it then, sinners, only *possible*, that the things you have heard *may* be true; how can you acquit yourselves of the charge of imprudence and folly to the last degree, while you resolutely turn a deaf ear to these remonstrances? What is this better than laying violent hands on your own souls, and wilfully plunging yourselves in death and destruction? *He that sinneth against me, says wisdom, wrongeth his own soul;* and all

they that hate me, love death^y. O! may you be persuaded then, to listen to the voice of wisdom! Compare the dictates of scripture with those of your own consciences. Set the interests of this world in the balance with those of another. Reflect on the miserable state you are in, while at enmity with God and religion. Retire into your closets—converse with your own hearts—and pray God, if peradventure, your folly and disobedience may be forgiven you.^{y b} So would we most heartily commend you to his rich and boundless mercy, through Jesus Christ, and to the mighty influence of his grace and Spirit. To conclude,

3. What abundant cause have you for joy and thankfulness, who are interested in the one thing needful, and have with Mary chosen the better part, which shall not be taken away from you^z! In proportion to the importance of this great concern, so should be the chearfulness of your spirits, and the gratitude of your hearts. Give God the praise; for from him it is you derive this inestimable blessing. Had he bestowed on you a crown, and denied you the one thing needful, you would have been miserable.

^y Prov. viii. 36.

^z Luke x. 42.

And

And since you possess that which is most necessary and desirable, and with which is connected the promise of every thing which infinite wisdom sees fit for you; be not careful and troubled about the many trifling affairs and enjoyments of the present life. They are trifling indeed, when compared with those momentous concerns of which we have been discoursing. Let not therefore an unbecoming anxiety about them ruffle your breasts, sadden your countenances, or disgrace your religion. Having sought first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, you are assured that *all other things shall be added to you*; that *God will withhold no good thing from you*^a; and that *your heavenly Father careth for you*^b. Refer then your temporal interests to the direction of a wise and good providence: and having intrusted your immortal spirits to the care of the Lord Jesus Christ, rest satisfied that he will keep what you have thus committed to him, against the great day^c.

^a Pf. lxxxiv. 11.

^b Luke xii. 30, 31.

^c 2 Tim. i. 12.

DISCOURSE



DISCOURSE V.

The Difficulties attending Religion.

P A R T I.

MATTH. XVI. 24.

Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

HAT there is a reality in serious religion, and that it is the most important concern of the present life, surely no thoughtful person will deny. Yet alas ! sad experience sufficiently proves, that a general persuasion of these things is ineffectual to determine men to

to the pursuit of it. The truth is, there are certain prejudices against the one thing needful, arising from the supposed unsurmountable difficulties attending it, which have taken such deep root in the human heart, that they unreasonably overpower all transient convictions of its importance.

To trace these prejudices up to their original source would be no difficult task; though to enumerate all the immediate causes of them, and to describe particularly the manner of their taking effect, would carry me too far beside my present design. It must however be observed in general, that mankind are in a fallen and depraved state, and that the heart hath received a bias quite opposite to what it had in the beginning. Men are prone to vanity and sin, and averse to that which is spiritual and good. And this disaffection to religion operates, by disposing the mind to admit readily every objection which is unfavourable to it, whether real or only imaginary. The chief therefore of these practical objections I propose to consider, to set them in their full light, and give them their due weight; that we may see how far their usual influence upon the heart, in the face of all the evidence we have of the truth and importance

importance of religion, is to be justified even upon the principles of natural reason.

They are reducible to three heads — The restraints which religion obliges us to lay upon our inclinations and passions ; we must *deny ourselves*.—The afflictions and sufferings in which it does or may involve us ; we must *take up our cross*.—And that perfection of character it seems to injoin ; we must *follow Christ*. All this our Saviour tells us is necessary to our becoming his disciples. The explanation therefore of these sacred injunctions, will give me an opportunity of shewing, that some of those difficulties which are apt to startle the mind at the first appearance of religion, are intirely groundless ; and that others, though they may be real difficulties in the apprehension of depraved nature, yet are most fit and reasonable to be complied with.

In the mean while it may throw some light upon the text, to advert a moment to the occasion of our Lord's thus addressing his disciples. He had been foretelling his approaching sufferings. Upon which Peter, urged by the violence of his natural passions, and not considering the indispensable importance of our Saviour's death, began to rebuke him, saying, *Be it far from thee, Lord:*

this

this shall not be unto thee. But Jesus turned, and with unusual severity said unto Peter, *Get thee behind me, Satan, thou artest the part of a devil and an adversary instead of a friend, thou art an offence to me : for it should seem by this thy language, that thou favourest not the things which be of God, but those which be of men^a ;* that thou hast lost sight of the great objects of my mission, the glory of God and the salvation of men, and art fondly dreaming, like the rest of the world, of temporal honors and pleasures. *Then said he to his disciples,* in order to guard them against this carnal temper, and to apprise them of what would be likely to befall them, *If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.* Nor are these injunctions to be limited to the immediate disciples of Christ : the occasion of the words, and the principles upon which you see he reasons, plainly shew that they are of more general use.

I. *Let him deny himself.*—“ Strange! say “ you. What more dear to a man than “ himself? And what more contrary to “ the first principles dictates and feelings

" of human nature, than for men to deny con-
" tradict and oppose themselves?" But surely
our Lord can never mean by this precept,

1. That we are to be our own enemies,
and to act in opposition to our own real in-
terests. This is a notion utterly repugnant
to every sound dictate of nature and reason.
Self-love is a principle which God hath
himself implanted in our breasts; and it is
so deeply rooted there, not to say how in-
nocent and useful it is when held under
proper restraints, that it cannot be eradi-
cated without the dissolution of our very ex-
istence. Does our Lord then, by requiring
us to deny ourselves, make it necessary for
us to extinguish this first principle of nature?
Does he solemnly enjoin that upon us,
which is absolutely impossible to be com-
plied with? — True indeed the gospel de-
mands our obedience upon motives of gra-
titude. But gratitude could have no place
in our hearts, if a regard to our own in-
terest were totally suppressed. For gratitude
supposes a sense of favors received, and that
a sensibility to our own good. If the gospel
therefore were to silence this first dictate of
nature, it would contradict itself, and in
effect forbid us to be influenced by this other
motive of gratitude.

But

But so far is this from being the case, that it approves of self-love, cherishes it, reasons from it. Need you be told with what warmth our Saviour and his apostles every where address the hopes and fears of men, passions which are evidently founded in this original principle? *Flee from the wrath to come*^e. *Fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell*^f. And a verse or two after the text, *What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?* Language this which manifestly supposes that we may, that we ought to love ourselves, that is, be concerned, passionately concerned for our real, our highest, our everlasting happiness.

But you will say, “ Though self-love in this refined sense of it, as respecting our well-being hereafter, be allowable; yet by this command Christ would inculcate,

2. “ A very unnatural kind of indifference to our present interests. *Let him deny himself*; that is, say you, *Let him consider the appetites and passions of nature as unlawful, and oppose them as absolute evils; let him be totally dead to the world, and rather reject than pursue any of its emoluments or pleasures.*” But this surely

^e Matth. iii. 7.

^f Matth. x. 28.

can never be the sense of the text. For if it were, it would take that for granted, which is highly dishonourable to God, and most unreasonable in itself. For how is it imaginable that God would have us account the proper gratification of those appetites and passions, which he hath implanted in us, and which are not to be eradicated while we continue here, criminal? All those precepts therefore which, like that in our text, require us to mortify our members which are on the earth^g, to crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts^h, to keep under our bodies and bring them into subjectionⁱ, and to be willing to part with all we have, yea our very lives, for Christ's sake^k; are to be understood with certain limitations. They can never mean to lay the comforts and concerns of the present life under an absolute and perpetual interdict. They can never mean to justify an indolent neglect of the duties of our several stations, an unnatural contempt of innocent enjoyments, or a wanton sacrifice of our lives upon the most trifling occasions.

On the contrary, the Christian doctrine adopts those very principles and maxims re-

^g Col. iii. 5.

^h Gal. v. 24.

ⁱ 1 Cor. ix. 27.

^k Matth. xvi. 25.

specting these matters, which nature itself dictates. For while it teaches that *no man ever hated his own flesh*¹, and that we ought *to do ourselves no harm*^m, it persuades us to such a temper and deportment as manifestly tend to promote our outward happiness and prosperity. It recommends industry, chearfulness, affability, sympathy and loveⁿ. So far is it from embittering the comforts of life, or rendering them insipid and tasteless, that it adds a new flavor to them. So far is it from dragging us out of society, and shutting us up in indolent retirement, that it puts us upon improving our circumstances, maintaining a friendly commerce with our fellow creatures, and doing them all the good which lies in our power. And so far is it from hardening the hearts of men against their own or the miseries of others, that it makes them susceptible of the tenderest emotions, and indeed of every impression which is beneficial to society. — Nor by requiring us to deny ourselves does our Lord mean,

3. To impose upon us any austeries penances or mortifications, which are purely arbitrary, and which tend not to answer

¹ Eph. v. 29.

^m Acts xvi. 28.

ⁿ Rom. xii. 11.

¹ Thes. v. 16. 1 Pet. iii. 8. Col. iii. 12, 13.

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some moral or spiritual purpose. He might indeed demand of us certain difficult and painful services, which should have no other intent than to serve as tests of our subjection to his authority. Yet even this he hath not done. I am aware that the two ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, are considered by some purely in this light. But it were easy to shew, that however they are properly enough on some accounts stiled positive institutions, yet there is the truest reason in them, and they are evidently adapted to promote our edification and comfort. And though this precept of denying ourselves hath respect, as will hereafter appear, to our foregoing under certain circumstances our bodily ease and worldly interest; yet these instances of self-denial are not imposed upon us merely for their own sake, but because the glory of God, the good of others, and our own advantage upon the whole, make them fit and necessary.

It is not therefore purely with a view to thwart and oppose our natural inclinations, and to give us pain and make us unhappy, that we are required in any instance whatever to deny ourselves. There are indeed those who pride themselves in the rigorous observance of popish severities, under a notion

of complying with the injunction in the text ; though rather it is to be feared, with a secret expectation of commuting with heaven for other criminal indulgences, or however of getting a character for a kind of religious heroism. But their conduct is so far from being acceptable to God, that it is highly displeasing to him. And the scriptures have not failed to condemn all this, as a vain shew of wisdom in will-worship, and humility, and neglecting the body *. — Thus you see by denying ourselves is not meant indifference to our interests in general ; or a total disregard to our worldly interests in particular ; or a subjection to any kind of voluntary mortifications or penances, merely for their own sake.

In what sense then is our Lord to be understood ? He means surely such a self-denial, and such only, as is in itself though very painful, yet most reasonable ; and though very contrary to our depraved nature, yet upon the whole for our real advantage. Now here we must distinguish between matters which are absolutely and in their own nature unlawful, and those which become so by occasion only ; in re-

* Col. ii. 23.

gard of each of which we are to deny ourselves.

1. It is unquestionably our duty to deny ourselves in every instance which is absolutely criminal. Human nature is miserably corrupted and depraved. Whence it happens that we feel innumerable inclinations and propensities in our breasts, which the least reflection must convince us are unreasonable sinful and injurious. To describe them particularly would be an endless task, as they are almost infinitely diversified, by the different circumstances and objects which excite inflame and aggravate them. I might here tell you of pride avarice lust envy malvolence anger revenge and the like; all which the apostle describes by the characters of *the old man and his deeds*^p, *the body of sin*^q, and *the flesh with its affections and lusts*^r.

Now these, be they what they may, must be denied. The very first risings of them must be checked and suppressed; all incitements to the gratification of them must be opposed; and all means and opportunities which offer to that purpose must be avoided. And it is easy to see that the thus denying

^p Col. iii. 9.

^q Rom. vi. 6.

^r Gal. v. 24.

them, especially if they are obstinate and impetuous, and if our temptations to the indulgence of them are numerous and powerful, will be very difficult and painful work. Hence it is described in scripture by the expressive figures of *mortification* and *crucifixion*, the *plucking out the right eye*, and *cutting off the right hand*. And hence the Christian life, the main duties of which consist in such self-denial, is compared to a warfare. Great vigilance resolution and labor are necessary. We must be ever upon our guard against the undue influence of external objects, ever attentive to the exercises of our own minds, and ever vigorous in our opposition to the first motions or tendencies to sin. In the attempting all which there will be many hard struggles and painful conflicts, the heart will be agitated by various passions, and the effect in some instances will be sad disappointment, and in others the most pleasing and happy success.

The reasonableness of this clearly appears, and the motives the gospel suggests to excite us to it, are very numerous and animating. But I shall waive the consideration hereof at present, as this will be the subject of the next discourse. Again,

2. The duty of self-denial hath respect to matters which are in themselves innocent and lawful, but which become otherwise by occasion. And such are all the enjoyments concerns and connections of life, yea life itself. There is nothing desirable of an outward or worldly kind, but we must under certain circumstances be willing to part with. Be they what they may we must renounce them, when they come into competition with the honor of God and religion, with the everlasting welfare of our fellow-creatures, and with our own highest and noblest interests. It is criminal in either of these cases, not to deny ourselves of what we might otherwise very lawfully and properly enjoy. But of this we shall discourse more largely hereafter.

Hitherto we have treated the subject of self-denial in general only. Let us now descend to particulars. What then are those instances of self-denial which are especially required of us, in order to our becoming the disciples of Christ ? I answer : as *Pride* and *Pleasure* are the prevailing passions of human nature, and the main obstructions to religion ; so to these two may be referred all the various expressions of this duty, which our Saviour would inculcate.

FIRST, As to *Pride*. The opposition which arises from hence to religion in general, and to the doctrine and service of Christ in particular, cannot but strike every considerate observer. There is,

i. A vain conceit of their own reason, which, if men will fear God and be the disciples of Jesus, they must deny and subdue. I mean not by this to reflect in the least on reason itself. It is a faculty with which God hath graciously endowed us, and which when duly exercised is of the highest importance in matters of religion, as well as those of a civil nature. But my meaning is to condemn what is falsely so called, and to expose that vain and confident opinion of their own understanding and judgment, which hurries too many into the most fatal and dangerous mistakes^s. The weakness and imperfection of the human mind no

^s Dr. Young speaking of the enemies of Christianity, who while they idolize reason, do in effect villify it, thus describes that kind of arrogance it is here meant to condemn:

While love of truth through all their camp resounds,
They draw pride's curtain o'er the noon-tide ray,
Spike up their inch of reason, on the point
Of philosophic wit, call'd argument,
And then exulting in their taper, cry,
"Behold the Sun :" and Indian-like adore.

NIGHT THOUGHTS.

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thoughtful person will deny. Nor will he deny that men are prone, in their reasonings on matters of religion especially, to be swayed and biased by the corrupt passions and prejudices of their hearts. Whence it happens that in many instances they reason very falsely; and in others though they reason truly from certain principles, yet those principles being false, they err in their conclusions.

Now the divine authority of the scriptures being admitted, (which it surely well may, the evidence is so clear and incontestible) what is therein plainly declared should be meekly received, though we may be at a loss to clear up some difficulties attending it. Absolute contradictions God cannot require us to believe, because in that case he would require us to believe a falsehood, it being impossible that two propositions, which directly contradict each other, should be both true. But there are truths he may require us to believe, which, though they are not contradictory, we may be at a loss fully to explain and reconcile. These therefore we are to receive upon the divine testimony: and upon the whole it is most reasonable we should do so, however unwilling

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we may be through prejudice to yield our assent¹.

Here then is one instance of self-denial, the meekly submitting to divine instruction, and not expecting more evidence upon a matter, than the nature of the thing will admit, or than God chuses to give. Nothing can be more fit and reasonable than this: yet so conceited are we of our own understanding, that it is with the utmost difficulty we are brought to acknowledge our ignorance fallibility and weakness. And such a false glare does prejudice many times cast upon the truth, that

¹ Dr. Barrow speaking of faith says — There can hardly be any greater instance of respect and love toward any person, than a ready yielding of assent to his words, when he doth aver things to our conceit absurd or incredible; than resting on his promise, when he seemeth to offer things impossible, or strangely difficult; than embracing his advice, when he recommendeth things very cross to our interest humor and pleasure; whence Abraham's faith, &c. — He afterwards adds — and many things doth the Christian doctrine propose, apt to try such friendship; many a hard saying doth it assert, which a profane mind can hardly swallow or digest: there is indeed scarce any article of faith at which we shall not boggle; any matter of duty which we shall not start at, any promise of God whereat we shall not stagger, if we be not seasoned with favourable apprehensions and inclinations towards him who recommendeth them to us, as endued with those attributes which secure their credibility.

BARROW on the AP. CREED, Ser. ii. p. 26. fol. edit.

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we had need use the greatest force with our passions, to prevent our being thereby deceived and misled. Hence our Lord makes a point of it with his disciples, that *they be converted and become as little children*^w, that is, that they be of a teachable disposition, readily acknowledging that they comparatively know nothing. And hence the apostle speaks of the efficacy of his preaching, through God, *to the casting down imaginations, or reasonings^w, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God^x.* Another expression of self-denial is,

2. The submitting cordially to that method of salvation which the gospel proposes. A scheme it is, wherein the wisdom righteousness and goodness of God are most amazingly displayed. God is reconciling sinners to himself, by the death of his son, not imputing their trespasses to them. But such is the pride of the human heart, that the grace expressed in this scheme becomes one principal prejudice with many against it. They vainly presume that they are innocent virtuous and good, or, to use our Saviour's words to the Laodiceans, that they *are rich*

^w Matth. xviii. 3.

^w Λογισμος.

^x 2 Cor. x. 5.

and in need of nothing^y: and so, not willing to renounce their own imaginary merit and righteousness in the sight of God, they treat the proposals of his mercy with indifference and neglect. Such was the temper and conduct of the Jews, of whom the apostle witnesseth, that *being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, they submitted not themselves to the righteousness of God*^z. And such was also the temper of many among the wise and learned Greeks, to whom *the preaching of the cross was foolishness*^a. Now if we will be the disciples of Christ, self must in this instance as well as the former be denied. We must come, guilty wretched and helpless as we are, and receive eternal life as the gift of God through Jesus Christ alone. Again,

3. We must deny ourselves, in respect of that vain confidence we are apt to place in our own strength. Self-sufficiency is a prevailing evil. For want of a thorough knowledge of their hearts, and through a strange propensity to flattery and self-deceit, men hastily judge themselves equal to almost every duty which is required of them, and every temptation and affliction which may

^y Rev. iii. 17.^z Rom. x. 3.^a 1 Cor. i. 18.

happen to them. The effect of which is a criminal disregard to the influence of divine providence and grace, and such a carelessness of temper as almost unavoidably betrays them into the most dangerous mistakes. This confidence therefore must be renounced ; and while we exert all the powers of the soul in the service of our divine Master, we must rely on his grace for success, and having succeeded, must give him the glory. It were endless to lead you into all the labyrinths of pride there are in the human heart—endless to tell you what vanity, what self-complacency, what superior ideas of our attainments gifts and graces, we too often feel within. Wherefore in the denying restraining and subduing them, consists much of the experience and practice of religion. It is no inconsiderable expression of this duty, when we are in the height of spiritual prosperity, to abhor ourselves and repent in dust and ashes ; when we have enjoyed communion with God, and the refined pleasures which result from a sense of his favor, to blush at our own vileness and unworthiness ; and when we have gained some eminent victory in our Christian warfare, with all humility to ascribe the honors of it, not to ourselves,

but

but to the power and grace of Christ. — In such instances as these, which do immediately affect the pride and vanity of the human heart, must self be denied.

Let us now consider this duty in reference,

SECONDLY, *To Pleasure.* By pleasure I mean the gratification of the appetites of animal nature, and of all those passions which have worldly good for their object. Various are the enjoyments, to which mankind feel a strong and unconquerable propensity ; such as health ease freedom peace wealth honor and the pleasures resulting from family and social connections, and from intellectual improvements. Nor is a propensity to them unlawful ; for they are the gifts of indulgent providence, and the proper use of them tends to our comfort and happiness. Yet there are two cases wherein we are to deny ourselves of even these comforts, that is to forego the possession or enjoyment of them. — The one is more general when our desire of them exceeds due bounds, and is in danger of destroying, or however weakening and enfeebling, the nobler affections and principles of the renewed mind. — And the other more particular, when the gratification of this or the other appetite or passion, clashes

clashes with our duty, and prevents or disturbs us in the faithful and regular discharge of it.

It is a fact beyond all dispute, that we are apt to exceed in our estimation of worldly things, and our fondness for the enjoyment of them. Which is the effect partly of the corruption of human nature, and partly of our close and intimate connection with sensible objects. And this excess of the passions very essentially injures us, not only by disturbing the composure of the mind, engrossing too much of our time, and hurrying us into unreasonable and dangerous pursuits; but by palling our appetite, and producing a very hurtful and criminal indifference to refined and spiritual enjoyments. On these accounts the Christian very justly considers the world as his enemy, and complains frequently in the bitterness of his spirit of the incroachments it makes on his best interests. Whence it follows, that in order to preserve a balance in his heart, I should rather say in order to secure the weight on the side of the infinitely important concerns of God and religion, it is necessary he should deny himself occasionally of a great many comforts and indulgences, he might otherwise lawfully enjoy. Nor will he be at any great

great loss to determine when this should be done, if he attentively regards the present state of his mind. Do we feel, which is most commonly the case, too strong a bent of the heart and affections to the world? That bent is no otherwise to be counteracted and subdued, with the help of divine grace, than by a resolute denial of our impetuous desires in this or the other instance which offers. So farther,

When the gratification of our appetites and passions, is in any particular instance incompatible with some duty whether civil or religious, which immediately demands our attention, it is without doubt to be denied. I might put many cases of this sort, which very frequently occur. They are however all reducible to these general heads — the regular discharge of the duties of religious worship—the exerting ourselves on some special and extraordinary occasions, for the advancement of the kingdom and interest of Christ — the bearing a public testimony to the truths of religion—the shewing proper offices of kindness to our fellow creatures and fellow christians — and, as hath been already hinted, the keeping up the discipline of the heart, and cultivating the several Christian graces. It is easy to see

see that in innumerable instances of this sort, if we will acquit ourselves as becometh men much more the disciples of Jesus, we must violently thwart and oppose our natural inclinations and propensities, must rouse ourselves out of a supine inactive slothful state, must sacrifice many desirable enjoyments of an outward kind, nay be content to endure many pains sorrows and disappointments, which for their own sake we cannot but wish to escape, yea even death itself. In this sense our Lord is to be understood, when he speaks of our *forsaking houses, brethren, sisters, father, mother, wife, children and lands for his sake*^b. But the consideration of suffering falls more properly under the next head of discourse.

Thus have we seen wherein the duty of *Self-denial* consists, and what are the principal expressions of it, in reference to pride and pleasure, the two prevailing passions of human nature.

^b Matth. xix. 29.

DISCOURSE V,

PART II.

WE come now to the second branch of duty, our Saviour requires of the man who will be his disciple;

II. *Let him take up his cross.* By the cross is meant persecution chiefly; but it may not be amiss to extend the idea to all that anxiety and trouble, in which the experience and profession of religion are commonly supposed to involve the Christian. Now before we come to enumerate these afflictions, and to shew how they ought to be endured, it will be necessary, in order to remove all groundless prejudices against the service of Christ on this account, to inquire how far they are, and how far they are not, to be set down to the account of religion. The fact

fact then is admitted, that he who will become a disciple of Christ, must take up his cross. But it is to be remembered,

i. In regard of the sorrows of the mind; that be they what they may, they are not properly speaking the offspring of religion, but of those disordered faculties of the mind, and of those depraved affections of the heart, which it is the kind office of the grace of God to rectify and cure. They take their rise either from natural gloominess of constitution, or an occasional depression of the animal spirits, or mistaken apprehensions of divine truths, or a wrong interpretation of particular providences, or a doubtfulness of our interest in the favor of God, or struggles with corrupt passions, or the temptations of Satan, or in a word, a suspension for wise ends, of those divine comforts which were formerly enjoyed. These are the true sources of all that anxiety perturbation and distress, which sometimes spread darkness over our countenances, and give the most sorrowful accents to our prayers.

Our unhappiness therefore is owing to frailty and sin: nor is religion any otherwise accessory to it, than as with a divine influence it brings us to our senses, and

makes us capable of knowing and feeling what without it would prove our ruin. And should it on this account be censured? It would surely argue great perverseness, to impute the pains a sick friend endures, to his medicines instead of his disease. Or supposing his medicines were the occasions of some temporary uneasiness in the course of their operation, it would be no less folly to find fault with them on that account; since this very circumstance would afford a promising symptom of their success. In like manner, how strange is it that religion should stand charged with all those miseries, which are the natural product of the disease itself it is intended to cure; or that men should be prejudiced against it, on account of the painfulness of its operation, when they cannot but see, that this is rather the effect of the opposition it meets with from irregular passions, than of its own supposed unpleasant and irksome nature? To this objection therefore it may be answered, in much the same words the apostle uses when speaking of the law of God, *Is that which is good, made death unto me? God forbid. But sin that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good*^c. Nay on the con-

^c Rom. vii. 13.

trary,

trary, it may be truly affirmed, that its influence is most kind and salutary. Nor is religion,

2. The natural and necessary source of outward troubles. That good men meet with their disappointments and sorrows is not to be questioned. Nay it may, and often does so happen, that a greater proportion of them falls to their share than to others. But it is a false and injurious representation of religion, that it tends in its own nature to procure outward pain and suffering. The reverse is the case. They therefore reflect highly on the blessed God, who affect to speak of him, as if he were fond of afflicting those who most nearly resemble him; and as if he took pleasure in such unnatural offerings of penance and severity, as Romanists are forward to present him. No. The troubles of the present life are all of them the effects of sin: and if providence converts these natural evils into blessings, which is the case with respect to those who love God; it is surely no just prejudice against the service of Christ, that his disciples endure more of them than others.

And then as to persecution, though it be admitted that they who will live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer reproach and abuse;

it is however to be remembered, that this happens through the malice of Satan and the malevolence of wicked men. And will any one say, that it does in the least detract from the native excellency of religion, that apostate spirits are the avowed enemies of it? Or is it reasonable to expect that God should continually work miracles, to rescue his favourites from those evils, which may nevertheless be overruled for their good even in this life, and shall most certainly be rewarded with infinite joys and triumphs in another? And after all, persecution, in the fullest and most painful sense of the expression, falls not to the share of every Christian. We have no reason therefore to be offended at our Saviour for telling us, that if we will be his disciples, we must *take up our cross*, and so follow him.

Let me now then more particularly describe the *cross*, and the manner in which we are required to bear it. To begin in the

FIRST place, with afflictions of a religious kind. It were wrong to flatter men with a notion, that as soon as they shall commence disciples of Christ, they shall become perfectly happy. This is not to be expected. The judgment, how well soever it be informed,

will

will sometimes be perplexed with doubts. And whatever peace religion begets in the conscience, that peace will sometimes be disturbed and interrupted. Truth does not always strike the mind with the like evidence and conviction; nor does it always afford the like refreshment and joy to the heart. Now we shall see the Christian, in the course of his inquiries, embarrassed with unexpected difficulties, and it may be too upon the most interesting points; whence results a great deal of anxiety and distress. Now hurried with gloomy thoughts suggestions and temptations, which though involuntary make him very unhappy. Now struggling with corrupt passions and affections, and almost worn out with the conflict. Now questioning his interest in the favor of God, and writing bitter things against himself. Now walking in darkness and in the shadow of death, enjoying little comfort and enlargement in duty, and oppressed with many sad apprehensions and fears concerning futurity. These, it must be acknowledged, are some of his severest crosses; afflictions which very deeply and sensibly affect his heart, damp his spirits, and enervate all the powers of his soul. Insomuch that he can scarcely forbear expressing himself in the sorrowful

language of the psalmist, *Will the Lord cast off for ever? Will he be favourable no more? Hath he forgotten to be gracious? Hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?*^a

Yet these trials, so far as they are his affliction not his sin, are to be endured with patience and constancy. We are not to yield to the suggestions of Satan, or the discouragements of our own timorous hearts; nor yet to murmur at the chastening hand of God, or take occasion from thence to indulge hard thoughts of religion. But on the contrary, we are to resolve, in a dependance on divine grace, still to pursue our duty; be the opposition and difficulty we meet with ever so painful and distressing. And this surely is most reasonable, since these trials, not to say how far we are ourselves accessory to them, are often a very necessary part of Christian experience, and are overruled by a wise and good God to the most salutary and beneficial purposes. But it is,

SECONDLY, Outward trouble our Lord here chiefly, if not wholly intends. And it were endless to describe the many inconveniences pains and miseries, to which good men are liable for the sake of religion, and

* Ps. lxxvii. 7, 8, 9.

which

which under certain circumstances are scarcely to be avoided. Persecution assumes various forms, and innumerable are the instruments by which the wicked gratify their resentments against those who fear God. Here I might tell you of the shyness indifference and neglect, with which some humble serious Christians are treated, by their most intimate relations and connections in life; of the invidious reflections cast upon their understanding and prudence, as if they were fools or madmen; of the reproach and obloquy with which their characters are loaded, as if they were hypocrites and deceivers; of the discouragements thrown in the way of their worldly interests; of the abridgment of their liberties, the spoiling of their goods, and the abuse of their persons; of fines imprisonments and even death itself. Crosses these hard to be borne, even by such who are best prepared to endure them; since the grace of God does not divest men of the passions and feelings of humanity.

And they are crosses which have been imposed upon good men more or less in every age. The history of religion from the very beginning, furnishes innumerable instances of this sort. Between the seed of the wo-

man and of the serpent, that is, between the kingdom of Christ and of Satan, there ever hath been and ever will be an irreconcilable enmity. So that the bloody scene exhibited in the martyrdom of righteous Abel, hath been acted over again in thousands of his meek and pious successors. And if at any time the violence of persecution hath abated, it hath not been owing to the utter extirpation of that malevolent spirit which inspires it : but perhaps chiefly to a want of power in wicked men on the one hand, to compass their cruel purposes ; or to a decay of real religion among good men on the other, which hath nearly extinguished the usual provocation to it. Indeed it is our happiness to live in an age, wherein the principles both of civil and religious liberty, are better understood than they were formerly ; and wherein good sense moderation and humanity, have prevailed to render persecution, at least in the open and most obnoxious sense of the word, unfashionable. Nor should we forget, while history holds up to our view the sufferings of our renowned ancestors, to acknowledge the great goodness of God herein. Yet even now, there are few who nobly resolve at all events to express a becoming zeal for religion, but meet

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with slights and discouragements of one kind or other, which may without the charge of affectation, come under the denomination of the cross.

What then is the spirit of this command of our Saviour to take up the cross? It can never intend that we are to court persecution. That were madness indeed. Calumny and abuse, hunger and want, the dungeon and the stake, are not surely to be coveted; nor can it be right, through a false kind of emulation to win the crown of martyrdom, to take indirect measures to procure it. For by so doing we betray a vanity and wantonness of mind, which is very unsuitable to the true genius and spirit of the gospel; nay we become accessories to the crime of which they are guilty, whom we thus tempt to commit this great evil. It should be our care therefore, that we do not by an imprudent behaviour, or by an indecent boldness, provoke the enemies of truth and religion to a conduct, which must in the end involve them in misery. Nor does our Lord mean to forbid a proper resistance to suffering, when that is in our power. *When we are persecuted in one city, we are to flee to another.* If we can tie up the hands of the

oppressor, or prudently ward off the blow he meditates, we are hereby doing a kindness to him as well as ourselves. Nay we may lawfully defend our lives and properties, even though it be at the manifest hazard of theirs, who would deprive us of them, provided all other means are ineffectual. And yet in regard of some lesser evils, it were better quietly to endure them, than by an obstinate defence endanger the still greater damage of him who would injure us, and risk the charge of malevolence and revenge.

But when the only alternative is suffering or sinning, bearing the cross or violating conscience, we are not allowed to hesitate a moment upon the question. We are to take it up, to carry it, yea if such be the will of God, to resign our lives thereon. Now this injunction of our Lord's includes in it—the counting of suffering beforehand — the meeting it with coolness and composure — the enduring it with meekness and resolution — and what is more than all this, the glorying in it as our highest honor.

I. It is our wisdom, when we first become the disciples of Christ, to set before our eyes the risks we are to run, and the dangers we are to encounter in his service. What if

if imagination be allowed to paint these scenes in the strongest colors? It will be a likely means to try the sincerity and ardor of our love, and to prepare us for what may be the event. Our Lord had the utmost tenderness for his immediate followers; yet he forbore not to discourse frequently with them on subjects of this nature. *Behold I send you forth as sheep among wolves. They will deliver you up to the councils, and scourge you in their synagogues. Ye shall be brought before governors and kings, and be hated of all men for my sake^f.* Sad tidings these! But was it merely to alarm their fears, that he thus addressed them. No—He had more compassion for them than all this! His view was to put them in a fit posture to meet what was coming upon them. It had been his own practice to ruminate frequently on his future sufferings. Deserts mountains and solitary places, had borne witness to these his preparations for affliction and death. He would therefore recommend it to them, by contemplation and prayer to take up the cross, and follow him. And thus are we to gird up our loins for the race we have to run; and ere we set out on our warfare, to count the cost. And what will be the effect,

^f Matth. x. 16—22.

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2. But the meeting our sufferings with calmness and composure of mind, a temper admirably expressed by the phrase in the text? The enemy may assault us on a sudden; and surprizes are dangerous. Our Lord in one of his parables, speaks of those hearers of the word, who *having no root in themselves, when persecution or tribulation ariseth are quickly offended*^g. But he who hath often at proper seasons, anticipated the discouragements he may endure for Christ's sake, and hath boldly ventured on a profession of religion in the prospect of them; though when they arise he may sensibly feel them, yet, to use the language of scripture, he will not be afraid with any amazement. *Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial, which is to try you*^h, was the calm advice of an apostle, who had not only long borne the cross, but knew that he should one day actually suffer death thereon. What self possession, what admirable composure and serenity of mind, did the primitive Christians many of them enjoy, when they beheld the blackest storms of persecution just bursting on their heads! Whilst their persecutors breathed out threatenings and slaughter, and were mad with rage and resentment, they

^g Matth. xiii. 21.

^h 1 Pet. iv. 12.

could

could coolly reason and reflect, they could with divine eloquence expostulate and persuade. Be our afflictions then what they may, in such manner it is our duty to meet them. And if we thus take up the cross, we shall be likely,

3. To bear it with meekness and resolution. A base servile submission to the impositions and abuses of unreasonable men, is unworthy of a Christian. It is a temper which, as I said before, the text by no means countenances. Our Saviour himself shewed a noble superiority to it; as did also the great apostle, who stands distinguished in the list of his suffering followers. Yet with a generous sense of freedom, and a spirit on every proper occasion to assert it, that meekness our Lord here inculcates well consists. It is truly noble with the gentleness of a lamb to endure the miseries, which are not to be escaped but at the expence of truth and conscience; to suppress every unbecoming thought of the divine providence which permits them; to forbear all indecent and clamorous reflections on the immediate instruments of them; and to pour out our sincere and compassionate addresses to heaven, on behalf of those who are maliciously threatening our destruction. But there is a

yet higher and nobler attainment, to which as the disciples of Jesus we should aspire ; and that is,

4. Glorifying in the cross of Christ. He who suffers in the cause of religion, may be justly considered as the favourite of heaven, and the man whom God delights to honour. He is dignified above many of his fellow-disciples, by being thus employed in the most interesting services, for the church of Christ [and indeed mankind in general. His behaviour, if it be such as hath been represented, hath a direct and mighty influence to confirm the faith of other Christians, to fix a conviction of the truth on the consciences of the wicked, and to command the reverence, if not affection, of all beholders. And, besides the divine consolations he may reasonably hope to enjoy, in the severest moments of trial ; there awaits him a crown of unfading glory in the world to come. Well may he therefore, animated by these considerations, like his divine Master, *endure the cross and despise the shame*¹ ! Well may he take pleasure, as the apostle expresses it, *in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake*² ! Well may he, in a word,

¹ Heb. xii. 2;

² 2 Cor. xiii. 10.

by the grace of God not only with meekness bear the cross, but even triumph amidst the horrors of death itself!

And now what objection can we have to this sacred injunction? It is most fit and reasonable. Nay it ought to be most chearfully complied with. For if we do sincerely love Christ, we have every imaginable consideration, to enflame our zeal and animate our breasts in his service. But this is a subject I must refer to the next discourse.

DISCOURSE V.

P A R T III.

LE T us now proceed to the third and last expression of obedience, which our Saviour demands of his disciples ; and that is,

III. *To follow him.* Indeed the phrase in this place, is understood by some as only a redundancy of expression. *If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and so follow me,* or come after me. But I think it adds a beauty to the passage, as well as amplifies the sense of it, to consider this last clause, as designed to convey some farther distinct idea of our duty. You see our Lord rises by degrees. Self-denial he recommends in the first place. Then a patient submission to suffering. And last of all a general conformity to his will, and imitation of his example. In the

former instances what he requires is chiefly negative, in this it is wholly positive.

Now our Saviour's character, it is acknowledged on all hands, was in the strictest sense perfect. So that when he requires us to follow him, in order to our becoming his disciples, it may seem as if he expected that of us, which is in its own nature impossible, I mean an absolute perfection of character. Before therefore we proceed to illustrate the duty here enjoined, it may be proper to obviate this farther prejudice against religion, as we have already those which arise from the duties of self-denial and bearing the cross.

It is a prejudice which affects both the enemies and the friends of religion, at least some of them. As to the man who hath a secret dislike to what is serious and good, he is glad to avail himself of every circumstance, which may seem to justify his infidelity and disobedience. With warmth therefore and it may be an air of triumph, he puts in his exceptions to this command, as too refined and spiritual ever to become practicable. “ You tell me that all my objections to *self-denial* are vain ; for that it is a duty which very well consists with a

“ reasonable love of myself. And in like manner that the offence I have been apt to take at *the cross* is groundless ; for that the bearing it very well consists with a prudent concern for my temporal interests. Be it so. Yet *to follow Christ*, that is, to come up to that perfection of character which he is said to have possessed, is what no man is capable of in the present life. It is therefore vain to attempt it.” And then on the other hand as to the serious dejected Christian, though he is struck with the excellencies of Christ, and sincerely aims to copy after them ; yet he hath perhaps through weakness fixed the standard of religion so high, and is at the same time so deeply sensible of his own defects and imperfections, that he can scarcely allow himself to be a disciple of Jesus. “ I would fain resemble my Master. But ah ! his likeness is so imperfectly drawn out on my temper and life, that I fear it will be presumption in me to rank among his followers.” Now in order to obviate this objection, it is to be observed,

I. That perfection in the strictest sense of it, is not required of a disciple of Christ. The expression we do indeed often meet

with in the bible. Abraham is commanded to walk before God and be perfect¹. Our Saviour exhorts his disciples to be perfect, even as their Father in heaven is perfect^m. And the apostles with great earnestness press us to go on unto perfectionⁿ. Nay one of them declares, that he who is born of God sinneth not^o. But it would argue either very great weakness or perverseness, to infer from such expressions, the necessity of an absolute freedom from all impure mixtures in the present life. For this is an attainment so impossible in its own nature, so contrary to the experience of the most eminent Christians, and so intirely inconsistent with the vicissitude trial and affliction which attend them through this world, that no sober considerate man can imagine a book divinely inspired would affirm it to be necessary.

Nay it asserts the direct contrary. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us^p. Nor does it exhibit any one character to our view, except it be that of our Lord Jesus Christ, without apprizing us of its imperfections as well as its excellencies. Is Abraham applauded for his faith, Job for his patience, or Moses for

¹ Gen. xvii. 2.

^m Matth. v. 48.

ⁿ Heb. vi. 4.

^o 1 John v. 18.

^p 1 John i. 8.

his meekness ? Their mistakes are also faithfully reported, and even their failures in those very graces for which they were so much renowned. And he who reads the history of the New Testament, will see many blemishes in the characters of the apostles ; whilst he is obliged to acknowledge them upon the whole, men of strict integrity and exalted piety. And then as to Christ, though his character hath no defect in it, and it is unquestionably our duty to imitate it ; yet our being required to follow him does not oblige us to an exact resemblance of him, but only to use our utmost endeavours to that end.

“ But it will be said, though absolute perfection is not expected in the present life ; “ yet our Lord requires such an imitation of “ his example, as carries the idea of religion “ to a height of purity and spirituality which “ is scarcely attainable, or however not without the greatest difficulty.” It is therefore farther to be observed,

2. That the following Christ supposes a principle of religion already implanted in the heart ; and hath connected with it the promise of all needful influences from above, to aid us in our duty. To a carnal heart, a heart wholly under the dominion of

of sin, the lessons which Christ teaches may seem too hard to be learned, and the precepts he enjoins too severe and difficult to be obeyed. Nay to the Christian himself, under certain circumstances, they may seem almost impracticable. But surely where there is a firm faith of the great realities of religion, a fixed abhorrence of sin, a sincere love of God, and a taste for the refined pleasures of devotion; the commands of Christ even in their utmost latitude, will appear truly excellent and desirable.

With what an eager gust of affection does the psalmist utter these words — *O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes*^q! The tender feelings of that amiable woman Ruth for her mother Naomi, rendered the idea of following her, how painful soever on some accounts, easy and pleasant. She was not discouraged, as her sister Orpah seems to have been, by the sad thought of leaving her native country, and sharing with this poor destitute widow in her future hard fortunes. *His commands*, said the beloved disciple of Jesus, whose heart was impregnated with an unconquerable affection for his divine Master, *are not grievous*^r. You see then a principle of religion will greatly

^q Ps. cxix. 5.

^r 1 John v. 3.

facilitate our obedience, and so take off the edge of the objection.

And then farther, the promise of divine aids to assist him in his course of duty, tends mightily to attenuate and soften many circumstances, which to the Christian himself may sometimes appear hard and difficult. There are certain seasons in which, either through temptation, dejection of mind, or weakness of animal nature ; insuperable discouragements seem to lie in the way of his following Christ. He knows not how to think of deserting his Master, yet to keep close to him is, in his sad apprehension, when thus beclouded with perplexing doubts and fears, almost impossible. But be these discouragements what they may, he who hath required us to follow him hath sufficiently provided against them all, as we shall see more fully in the next discourse. *My grace is sufficient for thee². As thy days thy strength shall be¹.* And after all it is to be remembred,

3. That our highest attainments in religion are not the matter of our justification before God. This I the rather mention, because it seems to me to be a consideration of great moment, when rightly understood

² Cor. xii. 9.

¹ Deut. xxxiii. 25.

and

and applied, to relieve us of slavish fears, and to remove an objection which hath no small force to intimidate us from following Christ. If our Saviour had put the issue of our Salvation upon our rendering an exact and perfect obedience to the law of God, the ground on which the covenant of works originally stood; it had been a vain thing to think of being his disciple, because such an obedience, as we have already seen, is absolutely impracticable. No. The honors of the divine law and government are fully vindicated and maintained, by the sacrifice and righteousness of Christ. So that mercy, with all the consequent blessings of it, is extended towards sinners in a way perfectly consistent with justice and truth.

Which being the case it follows, that we have no cause to be discouraged in our religious pursuits, by a deep sense of our numerous follies and imperfections. For *if any man sin*, errs from his duty through temptation and bitterly laments it before God, let him remember, *we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous*^{*}. And yet this idea of our acceptance with God through the righteousness of Christ alone, which the apostle explains

* 1 John ii. 1.

and

and defends at large in his epistle to the Romans^w, very well consists with the necessity of personal character or inherent holiness, and is indeed the most noble and powerful motive to excite us to obedience.

Thus have I endeavoured to combat the objections, which are usually urged against this command of Christ. Which leads me now more particularly to illustrate the command itself. To follow Christ then, is,

1. To submit ourselves intirely to his guidance and direction. He hath undertaken to shew us the path to heaven; and he is every way equal to it, having a perfect knowledge of his Father's will, and a hearty affection to our interests. Many who have taken upon them to be the guides of others, have turned out weak and fallible, and some of them crafty and designing men. So that the unhappy multitude who have implicitly intrusted them with their understandings and consciences, have been quickly betrayed into errors and practices of the most pernicious tendency. And the blind becoming thus the leaders of the blind, it is not to be wondered that they have both fallen into the pit. But this is not the case here.

^w Rom. iii. 20—28. Chap. v. 15—21.

Christ

Christ hath claimed the character of a teacher come from God, assuring us that *all things are delivered to him of the Father*, that he is authorized to reveal him to whomsoever he will^x, that he is *the way the truth and the life*, and that *no man cometh to the Father but by him*^y. This claim he hath supported, not only by the sublimity and excellence of his doctrine, and the purity and exemplariness of his life, but by a series of incontestible miracles. Moses hath borne witness to him as the true prophet, commanding us *to bear him in all things*^z. And God himself hath declared by a voice from heaven, that he is well pleased with him, solemnly requiring us to be obedient to his instructions^a. So that he is an infallible guide, not capable of erring himself through ignorance prejudice or passion; nor yet of leading others astray, through ill-will or disaffection to them, or through any unworthy or self-interested views of his own.

Now to follow him, is to submit ourselves intirely and without the least doubt or hesitation to his instructions: just as a traveller who passing through a country he is a

^x Matth. xi. 27. ^y John xiv. 6. ^z Deut. xviii. 18, 19.

^a Matth. xvii. 15.

perfect stranger to, puts himself under the conduct of his guide, in whose integrity and knowledge of the way he implicitly confides. Fully persuaded of the divinity of our Lord's mission, we are meekly to receive his doctrine, not daring to dispute matters with him, or when he tells us *this* is the way, obstinately to insist upon it that *that* is better. And since it is natural to suppose he may tell us some things difficult to be comprehended, though by no means absurd or contradictory, and others which may clash with our perverse inclinations; it is absolutely necessary, as I have before shewn, that we resolutely mortify and subdue the pride of our depraved understandings, the prejudices of our stubborn wills, and the predilections of our vain and worldly hearts. We must not confer with flesh and blood, but consent to have our thoughts and reasonings brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. It must be a fixed point with us to yield to him in every matter, even the minutest, which from a careful examination of the authentic records he hath left us, appear clearly to us to be his mind and will. To him we must say, as the Israelites did to Moses, *Speak thou unto us all that the Lord our God shall speak unto thee,*

thee, and we will hear it^a. This is what the apostles stile the obedience of faith ; and all this enters into the idea of following Christ.

And as there is the highest reason, so there is the greatest satisfaction and pleasure in thus following him. For hereby the mind is relieved of those many perplexities, with which it is unavoidably entangled, while it hath no other guide to conduct it through the mazes of this life, but the dim light of nature, or the uncertain reasonings of weak and fallible men. Again,

2. To follow Christ is to make a public profession of his religion. This upon a general view of things and as matters are now circumstanced among us, may seem no very great hardship. For the case with us at present, is widely different from what it was in primitive times. The civil power was then on the side of infidelity, and few dared to profess themselves the disciples of Jesus, without the utmost hazard to their persons and fortunes. Whence it followed, that a public avowal of the Christian name, was of itself a sufficient proof of a man's sincerity ; and the apostles with good reason affirmed, that whoever called Jesus Lord, and confessed that

^a Deut. v. 27.

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Christ is come in the flesh, was of God^b. But now, the Christian religion is established by public authority ; so that to be a Christian, in the common acceptation of that character, is no other than to fall in with the opinion and profession of the bulk of mankind, or however of the country wherein we live. And this can never subject us to any kind of worldly inconvenience.

But if we consider well what is the leading doctrine of the New Testament, that which distinguishes the gospel from every other system of religion, and hath the main influence in forming the character, and giving life and vigor to the obedience of a real Christian ; and if we farther consider what is the true nature and intent of the positive institutions of Christ ; we shall find that to follow him, that is, to profess the one and duly to practise the others, will require a simplicity of heart and firmness of mind, which I fear few comparatively speaking possess.

No one can be a true disciple of Christ, who is not disposed with all becoming humility to acknowledge himself a miserable helpless sinner, and to ascribe his hope of eternal salvation to the mercy of God,

^b 1 Cor. xii. 3. 1 John iv. 2.

through

through the mediation sacrifice and righteousness of Christ alone. But it is easy to see that such a cordial subjection to Christ as our only Saviour, will have no inconsiderable difficulties to struggle with. It will meet with opposition, and with very powerful opposition in some instances, from the proud and false reasonings of the human heart, and from the strong prepossessions we all naturally feel in favor of ourselves, and of certain good qualities by which we imagine we stand distinguished from others. And then an open profession of these our regards to Christ, amidst the violent though unreasonable prejudices of many against the gospel, will be likely to draw upon us the contempt, if not abuse of such persons. Thus however it behoves us to follow Christ, in the face of the greatest opposition ; to consider his religion as our highest glory, and to be ever ready zealously to maintain and defend it. *I am not ashamed,* said the apostle, *of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.* *God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ,* by whom the world is crucified unto me, and

I unto the world^a. And again, Doubtless I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith^c.

A due regard also to the positive institutions of Christ, as well as this general profession of his doctrine, is included in the idea of following him. Convinced of the truth of his religion, and endued in our measure with the real spirit of it, we are to put on Christ by baptism. So it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness, as he himself expresses it, when he descended into the watry tomb, and was therein baptized of John. An institution this, by which in obedience to his authority, we declare our faith in his death and resurrection, and our resolution henceforth in a dependance on his grace, to walk in newness of life. Thus initiated into the service of our divine Master, we are to join ourselves to some society of Christians, that with them we may enjoy all those means of instruction counsel

^a Gal. vi. 14.

^c Philip. iii. 8, 9.

and

and reproof, which Christ hath appointed in his church ; and particularly the sacred ordinance of the Lord's Supper, a feast which he hath required his followers to observe to the end of time, in commemoration of his death, and the blessed fruits which result from it. So the primitive Christians, having been baptized, were added to the church, and *continued stedfastly in the apostle's doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers*^f.

Thus by a faithful and regular attendance on all the duties of public worship, and I may add of family and private devotion too, we are to follow Christ. And whoever considers the true intent of these his institutions, after what manner he hath commanded us to observe them, and the indifference if not contempt in which they are held, by too many who call themselves Christians ; will see that not a little zeal and resolution is requisite to the character of a real disciple of Christ. Once more,

3. To follow Christ is to imitate his example. And indeed it is to little purpose that we are warm advocates for his doctrine and institutions, if we are all the while estranged from his spirit and temper. Nay

^f Acts ii. 42.

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if this be the case, we do but affront him, amidst our highest professions of zeal for his service. A more deformed and wretched character can scarcely be imagined, than that of a man whose head is filled with religious speculations, while his heart is devoted to his lusts ; and who at the very same time he hath the assurance to say to Christ, as the Pharisees did of old, *Master thou teachest the way of God truly*^s, is thus in effect taking measures to betray him. No. If we will be his real disciples, while we acknowledge him as our guide, and confide in him as our Saviour, we must resolve to copy after him as our pattern. And a most bright and perfect pattern it is which he hath set us. It is an example exhibited to our view, amidst all the weaknesses of humanity, and so is exactly suited to our condition. An example free from every imaginable defect, and so hath the authority of a command. And the example of a friend to whom we are under the greatest obligations, and so hath in itself every possible motive of generosity and love to engage our imitation. Let us take a general view of it —

As to his piety towards God, it was truly noble and exalted. The most striking ex-

^s Matth. xx. 16.

pressions

pressions of reverence confidence submission devotion and obedience, appeared in the whole of his conduct. He daily conversed with God by his word and works, by prayer and praise, in his retirements and in public and social acts of worship. He carefully eyed the hand of God in every event, and improved all the occurrences of life to the great purposes of religion. The utmost abhorrence he ever expressed at all appearance of vice and sin, and the warmest affection and zeal for truth and holiness. In his Father's will, however contrary to his temporal interests, he chearfully acquiesced ; and in his faithfulness and goodness, amidst the darkest scenes of adversity, he firmly confided. In a word, the glory of God he pursued with unwearied ardor and resolution, though at the expence of his outward ease and happiness, and many times with little appearance of success.

As to social duties, need I tell you how prudently uprightly and benevolently he acquitted himself, in the whole of his conduct towards mankind ? Every character and relation of life he filled up, with the greatest propriety and exactness. Towards his parents he carried himself, with all filial reverence duty and affection. Towards his

disciples and friends, with all sincerity tenderness and fidelity. And towards his enemies with a patience and forbearance, and yet a sensibility and spirit, which exceed description. The strictest integrity and truth were stamped upon all his actions; and at the same time, prudence and discretion were tempered with all his native simplicity and plainness. He was ever respectful to his superiors, and condescending to those of low estate. Ever ready to redress the grievances of the oppressed, and to shew compassion and kindness to the afflicted. Ever meditating designs of general good, and ever vigorously carrying them into execution. His dress, his gesture, his familiar talk, his journeys from place to place, his public discourses, his miracles, in short all the actions of his life, were uniformly directed to this one point, the doing good.

And then his temper and conduct in regard of himself, were no less amiable and exemplary. In meekness and humility, temperance and sobriety, contentment and patience, spirituality and heavenly-mindedness, he shone with unrivalled lustre. Though conscious to himself that he possessed a perfection of wisdom and goodness, yet he was of a humble and lowly temper, and his carriage

riage was free from all appearance of affection and pride. Sensible as he was of the value and use of worldly enjoyments, he had a sovereign contempt for them all, in comparison with the refined pleasures of religion. No offers of worldly wealth or grandeur could tempt him from his duty ; nor could the extremities of poverty or want depress his spirits, or make him discontented and uneasy. Amidst the most violent storms of adversity, he stood calm and serene ; and amidst the insults of his haughty and cruel enemies, he was unmoved by passion or anger. In a word, with the most unparalleled meekness and fortitude, and with the most constant affection for those in whose stead he suffered, he met the rage of devils, the frowns of justice, and the terrors of death itself. — Such are the outlines of his character, the general expressions of his temper and conduct.

Now to follow him, is to copy after this his perfect example. It is, with respect to God, to take pains to come at the knowledge of his will ; to converse with him in holy duties, and by the various mediums of intercourse he hath appointed ; to rely firmly on his faithfulness in adversity, and gratefully to acknowledge his goodness in pro-

sperity ; to avoid sin as the greatest evil, and to aim sincerely to please and glorify him. As to men : to follow Christ, is to conduct ourselves with prudence and circumspection, with integrity and truth, with charity and kindness ; in every relation and character of life, and in all our dealings and concerns with one another. And as to ourselves : to follow him, is to be sober and temperate in the use of all our worldly enjoyments ; to be humble and condescending, when elevated above others by our attainments and successes ; to be meek and forgiving amidst our provocations to anger and resentment ; to be contented with the things which we have, and patient under the afflictions we suffer ; to mingle cheerfulness with gravity ; to make religion the grand object of our pursuit ; and in a dependance on the grace of God, to persevere in our duty to the end.

High and noble attainments these, and which no mere man hath ever possessed in their utmost perfection ! Nor can we expect to succeed in any of these instances of duty, without suffering many discouragements in the attempt. Satan, the world, and what is still more to be dreaded, our own foolish and corrupt hearts, will

will unite their utmost force to obstruct us in our course. Yet if we will be his disciples, it must be our resolution, amidst every discouragement and imperfection, to make it our aim thus to follow Christ.

And now having considered the several duties enjoined in the text, and the difficulties both real and imaginary which attend them ; let me ask, What man who duly weighs these things, and by the grace of God enters into the spirit of them, can have any objection to the becoming a disciple of Jesus ? His service is most reasonable advantageous and honourable. We have every imaginable consideration to engage us to enter upon it, and to animate us in it. His *yoke is easy, and his burden is light*^b. Nay more than this ; his *ways are ways of pleasantness, and all his paths peace*ⁱ. But I shall not enter on these things at present : they will be the subjects of the following discourses.

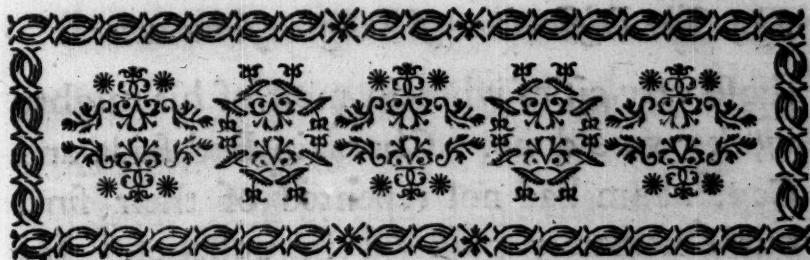
In the meanwhile let us examine ourselves, whether we are the disciples of Christ. Is it our concern, in the sense our Saviour is to be understood, *to deny or please ourselves? to take up the cross or to shun it? to follow Christ or the world?* These are interesting questions.

^b Matth. xi. 30.

ⁱ Prov. iii. 17.

It will be happy if we can make a favourable reply. Be the answer however what it may, God grant that henceforth we may be persuaded, by the alluring influence of divine grace, to make his service the object of our main attention, and most cheerful pursuit !

DISCOURSE



DISCOURSE VI.

The Difficulties of Religion
surmounted.

P A R T I.

MATTH. xi. 30.

For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light,

O spake the blessed Jesus in the
days of his flesh, when he conde-
scended himself, with his own kind
lips, to publish the glad tidings
of salvation. His ministry, it seems, had
met with very ungrateful treatment, from
those

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those very cities wherein most of his mighty works were done. Chorazin Bethsaida and Capernaum had not repented of their sins, but obstinately persisted in unbelief. He rejoices however that there were those, even among the mean and illiterate, upon whom the blessings of religion were bestowed: and acknowledging the distinguishing goodness of God herein, he adds, *Even so Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight*^k. Upon which he takes occasion very explicitly to assert his own character, and the important ends of his mission; that *all things were delivered unto him of his Father*, and that he was authorized to reveal him and his grace to whomsoever he would^l. Agreeable therefore to the commission he had received, he applies himself immediately to the duties of his prophetic character, earnestly intreating *all who labour and are heavy laden, to come to him, to take his yoke upon them*, and to submit to his instruction; assuring them at the same time that *they shall find rest unto their souls*^m. For, says he in the text, *My yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*

Some think our Saviour here refers to the ceremonial law; and that as he is speaking more immediately to Jews, he intends the

^k Ver. 26.

^l Ver. 27.

^m Ver. 28, 29.

advantage

advantage of an exemption from that law, which they would obtain by becoming his disciples. And certain it is, that the observation of those rites was a yoke, which neither they nor their fathers were able to bear, and from which Christ did at the proper time release his followers: wherefore he might be justly said on this account to have given them rest. And since the new dispensation he established in the room of it, is plain and familiar, and the institutions of it few and easy to be performed; his yoke might with good reason be styled an easy yoke. It is certain likewise that the Pharisees and teachers of the law did, by their vain traditions, unwarrantably add weight to the burden which Moses had laid upon the people. As therefore our Lord on all occasions, very freely exposed and condemned these iniquitous encroachments of ecclesiastical power, he might be properly said in this respect also, to have given them rest. While at the same time, the burden he imposed on his disciples was light in comparison with theirs; since what he required was in itself most fit and reasonable, however a compliance with it might expose them to some few temporary inconveniences.

But

But though all this may be included in the text, it does not come up to the full sense of it. Something of still greater importance is intended. Our Lord had been lamenting the impenitence and irreligion of the generality of his hearers : and it is but natural to conclude from thence, that when he presently after invites men to come to him, and take his yoke upon them, he means to recommend the opposite temper and practice, to that he had been deplored. Wherefore by those who labour and are heavy laden he must intend, not such only who were weary of Jewish ceremonies and traditions ; but all those who are tired of the galling yoke of sin, and borne down with the guilt of it. “*Come unto me, and I will give you rest*, that is, Believe in me, and “*I will set you free from the base servitude of your lusts, and from the dread you feel of the divine wrath*. *Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me*, that is, Be my disciples and imitate my example, *for I am meek, and lowly in heart*. And though my service be on some accounts *a yoke*, and “*through some disagreeable circumstances which attend it a burden*; yet that *yoke is easy, that burden is light*. Whatever “*I require*

“ I require of you it is most reasonable, and
“ my grace will render the performance
“ of it not only practicable, but pleasant.
“ It is an *easy* service or *gracious*”, (as some
“ render the word) not hard and severe,
“ but mild and gentle. And as to suffer-
“ ing for my sake, which may be your lot,
“ think it not a burden, or however be af-
“ fured it is but a light burden ; for I will
“ give you strength to endure it, and will
“ in the end reward your patience and love,
“ with a never-fading crown of glory.”

What it is to be a Christian, or as our Lord here expresses it, to take his yoke upon us, I shall not stay particularly to shew. It hath been attempted at large in a former discourse. It is to believe in Christ as our Saviour and Friend, and to submit to him as our Lord and Sovereign. It is to rely upon his mediation and righteousness for our acceptance with God, and to make his will the rule of our lives. It is to profess his doctrine, to conform to his institutions, and if he call us to it, to endure sufferings for his sake. Now it is acknowledged, consider-
ing the corruption of the human heart, the opposition of Satan, the intoxicating nature of worldly pleasures, the force of

^a Xpnsds.

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bad

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bad example, the contempt in which religion is held by the generality of mankind, and many other circumstances which might be mentioned ; it is acknowledged I say, considering these things, that no small difficulty and self-denial must attend the service of Christ.

Whatever therefore of this sort the figures of *a yoke* and *a burden* may suggest, or can indeed with any reason be supposed, we will admit. Let imagination, yea even prejudice itself, magnify these difficulties and set them in every possible light. Figure to yourselves the Christian in the character of a soldier, contending with the powers of the world and the prince of darkness, plunged in all the horrors of war, and fighting his way to heaven through reproach persecution and death. Behold him wrestling with sin and sense, with the evil passions of his heart and the irregular appetites of nature ; by many painful struggles bringing under his body, and by reiterated blows keeping it in subjection^o. View him pressing on in the course of duty, with all the attention and eagerness of a racer ; reaching forth to the things which are before^p, straining every nerve, and aiming with unremitting ardor at the prize. In a

^o 1 Cor. ix. 27.

^p Philip. iii. 13.

word ;

word ; suppose him for once like his Master, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, clad in sack-cloth and ashes, beset with sad and numerous temptations, and even denied for a while the enlivening presence of his God. Still it remains true, that *the yoke of Christ is easy, and his burden light.* Considerations there are enough to balance every discouragement which hath been mentioned.

These considerations let me now lay before you, and then make some suitable improvement of the whole.

I. The service of Christ is in itself highly reasonable. What one thing hath he required of his disciples, which their judgment and conscience do not upon the most deliberate reflections approve, as most fit and becoming ?

i. He hath commanded us, as hath been shewn in the former discourse, to *deny ourselves*, that is, to lay an absolute restraint on all irregular passions and appetites, and to that end to forego occasionally such gratifications as are in themselves lawful. And should not this be done ? Is it not our duty, our interest to comply ? Can we hesitate a moment upon the question, whether pride

avarice lust envy malevolence anger and revenge, ought to be soothed and cherished in our breasts, or mortified and subdued? If they are in themselves evil, if they are contrary to the express command of God, and if they are hurtful to our own interests both here and hereafter; hath not Christ done right, and approved himself our real friend, in pressing this injunction upon us, however disagreeable to depraved nature? Had the reverse of this been the case, had he required us to give full scope to our corrupt inclinations, and to gratify them in every instance which offered; had he for example, commanded us to be covetous envious and revengeful, lewd fierce and intemperate; should we not have had just cause to complain, that we were hardly dealt by?

And since the violence and turbulency of our passions, is scarcely to be subdued without the exercise of severe and prudent discipline; is it not highly reasonable, yea necessary on certain occasions, to preclude ourselves from pleasures, which are in their own nature innocent and good? If the soldier, eager to obtain the rewards of victory, must prepare himself for the toils and hardships of war, by a voluntary abstinence from

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the soft indulgences of sense ; why should it be thought strange that religion, which is no other than a warfare with our most dangerous enemies, should oblige the Christian to the like conduct ? especially since his Master hath set him an example of self-denial, in regard of the innocent and desirable enjoyments of life ; though he stood not in need of these exercises as we do, to prepare him for the work and duty he had undertaken. The pleasure likewise which attends every advantage gained over our spiritual enemies, and the animating prospect of that crown of life, which Christ hath promised to him who is faithful unto death ; may well reconcile us to this part of his service, however difficult and painful. Again,

2. Christ hath commanded us to *take up our cross*, that is, to endure patiently whatever afflictions may befall us, especially those to which a profession of religion may expose us. From the common infirmities and troubles of life, we have surely no reason to expect the Christian character should secure us. A quiet submission therefore to them, is equally a dictate of nature and religion. And as to those of an inward or spiritual kind, they are no just occasions of offence at the service of Christ ; since they are not

owing to that cause, but to others of quite a different nature, that is, to gloominess of constitution, to unbelief, to the conflict which we are necessarily obliged to maintain with our lusts, or to the withdrawal of the divine presence, which is the effect of sin, and is designed also as a means to promote our real good. These crosses therefore it is most reasonable we should bear. And then as to the troubles, in which a faithful attachment to truth, to conscience, and to the interest of Christ, may occasionally involve us, and which is what our Saviour chiefly intends; these owe their existence, as hath been shewn, to the malice of Satan and the malevolence of wicked men, and they are over-ruled by Providence, to answer very wise and important purposes.

It is therefore by no means strange, that a disciple of Christ is required to take up his cross. It is fit he should. It is his duty. It is upon the whole his interest. Does not reason teach that a lesser advantage should be foregone, when it stands in the way of a greater? And that as to suffering, it is better, as our Saviour expresses it, *that one of the members should perish, than that the whole body should be cast into hell*^q? And

^q Matth. v. 29.

though

though it may seem a violation of the law of nature, to expose ourselves to poverty reproach and death, when it is in our power to escape them ; yet when the duty we owe to God, our obligations to the Lord Jesus Christ, and our own most important interests in another world are at stake, it were surely the most extravagant madness and folly, to secure to ourselves outward ease and happiness, yea even life itself, at so prodigious an expence.

But when we take into view the supports and comforts promised to the suffering Christian, and the rewards of unutterable bliss and glory laid up for him in heaven ; the cross surely is rather to be coveted than shunned. *Verily I say unto you,* is the language of Christ to all his persecuted disciples, *there is no man who hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake ; who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting*¹. And with all this light and splendor around us, we well know how to account for those otherwise strange passages of scripture, wherein we read of the primitive Christians *glorying in tribulation*². To take up the

¹ Luke xviii. 29, 30.

² Rom. v. 3.

cross then is a most reasonable precept. And so likewise is that precept,

3. Of following Christ, that is, learning of him, and aiming at a perfect conformity to his will and example. Can it be questioned whether we ought implicitly to receive his doctrine, who brings with him such clear and incontestible proofs of a divine mission? Or whether we should cheerfully accept of mercy at his hands, since in this way it is so honourable to God, and so infinitely beneficial to ourselves? Can it be questioned whether so fair a pattern, as that he hath set before us, ought to be copied; a pattern which though we cannot fully come up to it, yet charms the heart of every attentive and truly serious beholder? Will any one say that Christ is an unreasonable or hard Master, in requiring us to cultivate humility contentment patience meekness and love, to seek the good of our fellow creatures, to make the glory of God the scope of our actions, and to consider the divine favor as our chief and ultimate felicity?

In like manner, Is there any just ground to find fault with the institutions of Christ, as being either tedious or trifling? The forms he hath prescribed are plain and easy,

the signs natural and expressive, and the temper of the heart such exactly as is suited to our condition as sinners, and to the unparalleled condescensions of his grace as our Saviour. Even a Jew, though the rites of that dispensation were numerous expensive and burdensome, had no cause upon the whole, to dispute the wisdom and goodness of the great Legislator. How much less reason then have we to complain, who are not solemnly required, at the peril of our lives, to bring up our flocks and herds to the altar of the Lord ; but are sweetly allureed and persuaded, *to present our hearts unto God a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable through Jesus Christ*[†] ! The service then is in itself most reasonable. Whence let us now proceed to consider,

II. Our unspeakable obligations to him who hath demanded this service of us.

The fitness of any service is itself a sufficient reason for our compliance. But if it be required of us by a wise man, a good man, a man of eminence, a friend, a relation, a brother, a parent ; our obligations to obedience will be hereby greatly heightened and increased. The very idea of the cha-

[†] Rom. xii. 1.

racter which imposes it, will soften what might otherwise be deemed an imposition, and give it the pleasing denomination of a favor, a privilege, an honor. Such is the case with respect to the yoke of religion. It is itself easy ; and more than this, it is not forced on our necks by the severe and rigorous arm of tyranny and oppression, or of ignorance and superstition ; but by the kind and gentle hand of him, to whom we are infinitely obliged, and who is full of mercy and truth. It is the yoke of Christ ; of him who made us, who upholds us in our existence, who gave his life for us ; of him, whose authority wisdom and goodness stand confirmed by unquestionable evidence.

Behold, Christian, the adorable Saviour, survey the beauties of his countenance, contemplate the grace of his heart, reflect on the bounty of his hands ! And then say, whether the commands his lips pronounce, can ever sound harsh in your ears, or ever be ungrateful to your inclinations. What, O what hath he done for you ? rather should I say, What hath he not done for you ? In all your guilt and misery he saw you, he pitied you, he ran to your relief. The bliss and glory he possessed in heaven could not detain him there — such was his love ! — when your redemption made it

it necessary for him to descend thence. No, nor could the direful agonies he had in prospect, shake his resolution, or hold him back from the great undertaking. He bowed his willing neck, and patiently, yea cheerfully for your sake took the yoke of human nature on him, with all its sinless infirmities. He was *made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem you from the curse of the law, and to intitle you to the adoption of sons*^u. On him was laid the heavy burden of your iniquities, and of the sons of the mighty there was not one, either able or willing to help him. He bore your griefs, he carried your sorrows. *He pleased not himself, but as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee, fell on me*^w. For you he lived, for you he died, for you he rose again. For you he now lives in heaven, to shower innumerable blessings upon you in your way through this world, and to prepare mansions of glory for you, against your arrival at that blissful state.

And can you, after all the evidence you have of his dignity and glory, dispute his authority to lay this yoke upon you? Or after all the proofs he hath given of his mildness and love, hesitate one moment at

^u Gal. iv. 4, 5.

^w Rom. xv. 3.

your obligations to submit to it ? Is not he who requires you to hear and obey him, *the Prophet whom the Lord your God hath raised up unto you*^x, and *in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*^y ? Is not he who demands your allegiance and subjection, the Prince who hath obtained your liberties for you at the expence of his blood ? A Master who hath too much gentleness in his nature, to impose a hard service on you ; and a Friend who loves you too well, to expect any other office at your hands, but what reason dictates and gratitude approves ? In a word ; is he not that righteous Judge, who will of his infinite grace, reward all your labor of love in another world, with a crown of unfading glory ?

And now say, whether these considerations, when impressed upon the heart by a lively faith, accompanied with a divine influence, may not well render *the yoke of Christ is easy, and his burden light.*

^x Deut. xxviii. 15.

^y Col. ii. 3.

DISCOURSE VI.

PART II.

AS a farther motive to animate us to our duty, it is to be remembred,

III. That when Christ invites men into his service, he means not to leave them to their own strength.

They who enter the lists with sin and sense, under the banner of Jesus the great Captain of salvation, shall not fail to be supported by him in the heat of the battle. His power is almighty, and he hath promised it shall rest upon them. *My grace is sufficient for thee ; for my strength is made perfect in weakness*². Blessed promise ! If it were not for this, how soon should we faint and tire in the path of duty ! how soon should we yield to the power and rage of

² 2 Cor. xii. 9.

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the enemy ! how soon should we sink under the weight of our own fears ! Difficult it is indeed to subdue corruptions, which resisting all the reasonings of philosophy, have obstinately triumphed over mankind. But *through Christ who strengtheneth us, we can do all things*^a. Difficult it is to make a bold stand against the world, its snares and temptations, its passions and prejudices. But having him on our side, who hath said, *Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world*^b, the conquest will, it must be easy. Difficult it is in a word, to support the heavy weight of affliction, which Providence sometimes judges it necessary to lay upon us ; and especially to resist unto blood, in the cause of truth and religion. But can it be imagined, that the merciful Saviour will call men to suffer for his sake, and when he has done so, desert them in the hour of trial ? Have not some of the most timorous of his disciples, strengthened by his grace, approved themselves champions on these tremendous occasions ? The habit, it is true, in which religion at such times appears, is by no means pleasing to an eye of sense. Nature starts back at the sight. The yoke seems hard, and the burden heavy. But faith, that grand

^a Phil. iv. 13.

^b John xvi. 33.

principle

principle of religion, when in its full strength, can counteract all the false reasonings of sense, and convince a man that it is his interest, in the face of every possible discouragement, to follow Christ.

I might here describe particularly, the various assistances afforded Christians in their duty, and the many seasonable supports vouchsafed them under their afflictions ; though the subject is too copious to be fully discussed. When God in his providence appoints them to important and arduous services, he often surprizes them with unexpected communications of divine grace. How amazingly are the powers of their minds, on some occasions especially, strengthened and enlarged ! Their breasts steeled with an uncommon degree of fortitude patience and constancy ! And their animal nature itself rendered capable of enduring extraordinary pain fatigue and labor ! So that blessed with a large share of the comforts of religion, and fired with a generous zeal for the glory of God and the good of mankind ; we have seen them surmount the greatest difficulties in their course of duty, and perform wonders in the service of their divine Master. In like manner as to afflictions ; what an amazing flow of spirits have some

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some Christians enjoyed, amidst the severest outward trials ! What solid peace and satisfaction have they felt in their consciences ! What firm confidence in the providence and grace of God ! And what enlivening prospects of a future happy immortality ! God has put underneath them his everlasting arms, and poured such consolations into their breasts, as have more than compensated all the pain and distress, attending their sharpest conflicts with sin and the world.

Nor are we without the noblest encouragements in the word of God, to expect such aids and supports in the service of Christ. What divine energy is there in these animating words, dictated by the love, and confirmed by the faithfulness of a God ! *When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee ; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee : when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burnt ; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee^c.* Fear thou not, for I am with thee : be not dismayed, for I am thy God : I will strengthen thee, yea I will help thee, yea I will uphold thee, with the right hand of my righteousness^d. Can faith hear such promises

^c Isa. xliii. 2.

^d Chap. xli. 10.

pronounced

pronounced in its ears, without boldly saying, *The Lord is my helper*^e? Did the three Jewish youths, who suffered so eminently in the cause of truth, judge the yoke of religion on this account to be severe, or its burden intolerable? *We are not careful*, say they to the tyrant, *to answer thee in this matter*. *If it be so*, our God whom we serve, is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O King. But if not, be it known unto thee, O King, that we will not serve thy Gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up^f. And what was the issue? when they passed through the midst of the fire, they had no hurt; for the Son of God whose servants they were, was with them. Or did the apostles conceive any ill prejudices against the doctrine or service of their Master, because of the extraordinary trials of an outward kind, to which their profession exposed them? *We are*, say they, *for his sake killed all the day long, and accounted as sheep for the slaughter*. Nevertheless, with what unaffected chearfulness do they add! *In all these things, in tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, sword,*

^e Heb. xiii. 6.

^f Dan. iii. 16, 17, 18.

*we are more than conquerors through him
that loved us*⁸. Which leads me to observe,

IV. That this yoke, this burden has been borne by many who have gone before us ; and having therefore been tried, it is plain it is not unsupportable.

God has had a people firmly attached to his interests, and cheerfully disposed to his service, in every age from the very beginning. A few there were in the old world, who dared to call upon the name of the Lord, and at a time when the earth was as generally overwhelmed with infidelity and vice, as it afterwards was with the waters of the flood. There was an Enoch who walked with God, when all mankind were in confederacy against God : and a Noah who preached righteousness, when not one could be prevailed on to listen to his instructions. Nor do we find that either of them, uncommon as their difficulties were, fainted in the service of their divine Master, or even dropt a complaint, that it was too painful and arduous to be performed. The submission required of Abraham, when commanded to follow God into a strange land, and with his own hands to offer up his only

⁸ Rom. viii. 35, 36, 37.

son,

son, one should have been ready to deem most severe and impracticable. But a firm faith in the promised Messiah, whose day he saw afar off, and the sight of which made him glad, softened his heart into an immediate compliance with the will of Heaven. Moses likewise, amidst all the wealth and gaiety of a splendid court, and all the alarming frowns of tyranny and persecution, cheerfully bowed his neck to the yoke of Christ; *chusing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; and esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward*^b. Nor were there wanting innumerable instances, all through the times of the judges and the prophets, down to the happy period in which Christ himself appeared; of persons, who though they enjoyed not those distinguishing advantages of knowledge and instruction which we possess, yet having their hearts moulded into the spirit of the gospel, had resolution enough in the face of the greatest opposition, to profess their faith in the expected Messiah.

^b Heb. xi. 25, 26.

And

And how it was during the time he so-journed here on earth, sacred history sufficiently shews. Every imaginable discouragement attended his service, arising from the poverty of his appearance, the general prejudices which prevailed against him, and the imperfect apprehensions which were formed of his doctrine ; yet there were a few who faithfully adhered to him amidst all these difficulties. And though the clearer light of divine truth, which afterwards irradiated the minds of these few disciples, did not disperse but rather increase that storm of persecution, which had been gathering over their heads ; yet their number multiplied exceedingly. So that what is commonly accounted the most burdensome and painful part of Christ's service, I mean suffering, was by the generality of Christians coveted as their highest honor, and gloried in as their brightest crown. So readily did they assent to the truth of what their Master had assured them, That *bis yoke is easy, and his burden light !* And witnesses without number have arisen, in every age and country where the gospel has been preached since that time, to authenticate this sacred declaration.

But why need we go from home to collect evidence upon this point ? Let every man

man say, who has felt the power and tasted the sweetness of religion (and surely there are yet some such among us) whether the words of Jesus have not been sufficiently verified in his own experience ? They are true ; every serious Christian will affirm them so, whatever painful struggles the remains of sin may daily occasion within, or whatever cruel opposition he may endure from a wicked world without.—The yoke then is tolerable, since it has, and still is borne by many, not with patience only but cheerfulness and pleasure. It is also to be observed,

V. In reference at least to some of the duties and sufferings required of a Christian, that hard as this yoke may at first seem, yet being used, it will become more easy.

I am sensible that it is not one good action or the repetition of it, which will constitute a man a real Christian, that is, give him a new nature, or make that pleasing to him from which he was before intirely averse. Yet it is easy to conceive, how the frequent exercise of a principle of religion already implanted in the heart, may tend to confirm that principle : and of consequence how the duty or service to which it impels us, may

become more and more agreeable. It stands to reason that whatever bodily labor fatigue or suffering may attend the discharge of any duty, it must by use be considerably lessened, if not intirely removed. For in regard of all these external circumstances, the case is much the same in matters of religion, as in the common business and concerns of life¹.

Let us put the case of one newly converted, and who hath formerly run great lengths in sin. The small degree of knowledge and experience which such a person possesses, the powerful opposition he meets with from temptation and evil example, his long custom in sinning, and the fears which through various causes are apt to arise in his breast; are all circumstances, which may very naturally be supposed to render some at least of the duties and services required of him, peculiarly arduous and painful. If indeed it be said, that the early dawn of the divine life is usually distinguished by the sprightliness and vigor of it; it is to be replied that this is chiefly owing to the extraordinary flow of zeal and affection peculiar to that period: and therefore

¹ It was Pythagoras's advice to his scholars : " Optimum
" *vitæ genus eligito, nam consuetudo faciet jucundissimum.*"

does not prove, that the young convert has fewer difficulties to contend with in the beginning, than afterwards. This then being admitted, it is but natural to conclude, that as his views enlarge, and faith takes deeper root in his heart, he will find the path of duty, though still strewed with its difficulties, become more and more easy. And this account of the matter is sufficiently countenanced by various passages of scripture.

You know how the apostle John ranks the disciples of Christ, in the different classes of *little children, and young men*; addressing the former of these characters with all the tenderness suited to the feeble state of infancy, and congratulating the latter upon the mighty victory they had obtained, through the superior strength with which they were endowed, over the rage and malice of a wicked world ^k. Nor can we forget how the author to the Hebrews describes some Christians, as mere babes in regard both of their weakness and inexperience, nourished only *with milk*, and *unskilful in the word of righteousness*: while he represents those of longer standing in the church of God, as men fed *with strong meat*, and

^k 1 John ii. 13, 14.

*having by reason of use, their senses exercised to discern both good and evil*¹. From all which it seems natural to infer, that though they are both the happy subjects of the grace of God, yet that the yoke of duty and suffering must for the most part, be more tolerable to him who is accustomed to it, than to him who hath but newly submitted to it.

This consideration therefore should have a farther influence, to reconcile the young Christian to the many difficulties which assault him, at his first entrance on the ways of religion. To conclude,

VI. And lastly, Suppose the yoke of Christ ever so grievous, it is nevertheless easy in comparison with the yoke of sin.

And of the truth of this, it will be readily allowed, that they who have made trial of the one and the other, are very competent judges. To the sentence however of wicked men themselves we may, upon a fair representation of the matter, appeal. And the verdict of their reason and conscience, we have no room to doubt will be given in favor of religion; even though the bias of their corrupt and perverse inclinations, lies

¹ Heb. v. 13, 14.

directly

directly the other way. Say then, you who yield yourselves servants to unrighteousness, is there any yoke so galling, any servitude so base, as that of sin? The prince you bow your knee to is more despotic and tyrannical, than ever was the haughty Pharaoh: and the masters you serve are far more severe and cruel in their demands, than were the Egyptian task-masters. They chastised the Israelites with whips; but these are not content without scourging your consciences with scorpions. What are the wages you receive at the hands of sin and Satan? Not such as you have fondly expected, real substantial and abiding pleasure; but shame misery and death. Follow yourselves through the drudgery of vice and sin; and say whether the poor brutal gratification of a moment, accompanied with satiety and disappointment, and attended with the most bitter remorse and the most painful reflections, whether this be a reward adequate to all your toils and labors?

How easy then, when compared with this yoke, is that which the merciful Jesus has framed, which his kind hand lays upon the neck of his disciples, and which by the influence of his good spirit he enables them to bear? Be it so that it is irksome to the

flesh ; yet it is not galling to the conscience, Be it so that a vain and foolish world have branded it with infamy and reproach ; yet in the account of God and of all wise men, it is truly becoming and honourable. Be it so that it subjects the Christian to outward inconvenience and trouble, and that by reason of the remains of sin it occasions him many grievous conflicts within ; yet scripture and experience testify, that it is most friendly both to his present and his future and everlasting interests.

Now all these things considered — the reasonableness of Christ's service — the obligations his grace hath laid upon us — the strength he promises us — the example of those gone before us — the advantage arising from improving experience — and the easiness of the yoke of Christ when compared with that of Satan — It follows that the difficulties attending religion, are not so great as sin and sense would represent them. And thus is our Saviour's assertion in the text, I hope fully and satisfactorily established, *My yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*

DISCOURSE VI.

P A R T III.

THE reasonableness of Christ's service, and the encouragements he hath given us amidst all the difficulties which attend it, we have considered at large. And it now remains that we make some suitable improvement of the subject.

FIRST, If the yoke of Christ is so very easy as hath been represented, how is it that men are generally prejudiced against it?

Some indeed will say, that they have their doubts as to the truth of our Saviour's mission and doctrine ; and that therefore it is not to be wondered at, that they do not become his disciples. To dispute matters with unbelievers is not my business here. Their objections are for the most part frivolous and vain ; and there is not one of them but

hath been fully and plainly refuted. So that without breach of charity it may be affirmed, that the opposition which Christianity meets with in the world, owes its existence more to the disaffection of mens hearts to the gospel itself, than to their conscientious scruples about the evidence of it. They have a secret and prevailing dislike to the spirit of this divine institution, and a bitter and obstinate aversion to its sacred precepts and injunctions. And if they did but deal honestly by themselves and others, they would acknowledge that the matter lies here — Christ's *sayings* are in the apprehension of their depraved nature *hard*, and so *they cannot bear them*^m.

But you have seen, that what he requires of his disciples is most fit and reasonable in itself, and most salutary and beneficial in its tendency. His commands will endure the strictest scrutiny. Let them all be brought forth to the light, and tried by every possible medium, which impartial reason can suggest. Let his most determined enemies ask themselves this plain question, Whether, admitting that Christ is infinitely wise and good, he could have done any other than require his disciples, *to deny themselves, to*

^m John vi. 60.

take

take up their cross, and to follow him? Or whether, if the matter were reversed, he would not have given a clear and undeniable proof, that his pretensions to a divine mission were false and groundless? What should we have thought of him, had he pressed it upon us as our incumbent duty, to throw the reins upon the neck of our inclinations and passions, and to allow ourselves in every vain pursuit, and carnal gratification we are capable of? To renounce truth and conscience, and all that is held sacred among men, rather than endure a few temporal evils and sufferings? And to follow the principles customs and manners of the world, in preference to an institution, which hath the evident marks of divine authority upon it? Would this, I say, have been wise and good? The powers of darkness might indeed have applauded such counsel; and while men greedily fell in with it, they would no doubt have malevolently triumphed in their present and everlasting ruin.

But he who came to seek and to save that which was lost, preaches another kind of doctrine; a doctrine which is holy just and good, and which unites the glory of God and the real interest of his disciples in one

point. And while he appeals to the judgments and consciences of his followers, for the excellence and utility of his precepts, gives the fullest proof of the disinterested and tender compassion of his heart, by himself bearing the cross before them, and pouring out his life thereon for their sakes. Amazing goodness ! How worthy is he to be loved and obeyed, by all who have any sense of duty gratitude and interest ?

But from whence do these sad and fatal prejudices against Christ and his service proceed ? They spring from that one grand source of all the miseries which this world suffers, the corruption of human nature. Let any one sit down, and impartially consider our Saviour's character and doctrine on the one hand, and the violent antipathy there is in most men to religion on the other ; and he cannot fail methinks readily to fall in with the scripture account of the apostacy of mankind, and the dreadful consequences which have followed upon it. Both prophets and apostles speak one language, *The whole world is become guilty before God. They are all under sin. There is none righteous no not one. There is none that understandeth, none that seeketh after God*ⁿ.

ⁿ Rom. iii. 19, 9, 10, 11.

And

And now, Sirs, if you have any conviction impressed upon your judgments and consciences of the truth of what our Saviour affirms in the text ; let me intreat you,

1. To enter into a close and serious consideration of this sad source of all your prejudices against Christ. You acknowledge them to be unreasonable. And since they are evidently the fruit of a vitiated imagination and a depraved will, it is fit you should be sensible of the diseased state you are in. *The whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.* Wherefore be persuaded to converse much with your own hearts ; to observe attentively the bent and tenor of your desires and affections ; and to consider well how all the false reasonings of your minds tend to one point, the gratification of your depraved inclinations. Compare this view of your own hearts, with the lively representations given of them in the sacred scriptures. Think much of the deformity and wretchedness of your condition. Be convinced of the necessity of a renovation of your nature, in order to your real happiness. Christ says to you as well as to Nicodemus, *Ye must be born again.* And the apostle assures you, that *they who are in the flesh*

• Matth. ix. 12.

¶ John iii. 7.

cannot

cannot please God^q. Let it also be remembered, that the more deeply you are sensible of the obstinacy of your disease, the more clearly will you perceive the suitableness and efficacy of that remedy, which divine grace hath provided.

2. Since all these prejudices, which I have endeavoured to expose, are sinful and groundless, take heed how you indulge or cherish them. Men would not be at so much pains, to fix the charge of unreasonableness and severity upon religion, if they did not secretly hope, hereby to get rid of that strong presumption in favor of its truth, which disturbs and galls their consciences. That is their object. And it is possible, that by an eager attention to the suggestions of their own corrupt hearts, and of wicked and profane men with whom they converse; they may after a while come to believe, that religion is all a dream. And the effect of this will be a total insensibility. There will remain no sentiment or feeling, capable of being addressed or expostulated with. And can you conceive of a more dangerous state of the mind than this? As you dread therefore the being thus hardened in infidelity and sin, beware how you countenance those preju-

^q Rom. viii. 8.

dices and objections, which have this direct and manifest tendency. Be on your guard against them. And whether they are started by your own perverted imagination, or are thrown in your way by Satan and his emissaries, who would gladly retain you in the service of sin ; do your utmost to stifle them in the birth, or oppose to them those reasonings which you have heard, and which in your judgment and conscience you acknowledge to be sound and good. Again,

3. Pray mightily to God, to subdue your stubborn will, and to conciliate your hearts and affections to his service. If you are fully persuaded that it is your interest to become the disciples of Christ, this persuasion in proportion to the strength of it, will put vigor and energy into your prayers. And the opposition it may meet with from carnal affections and worldly attachments, will serve to convince you more and more of your own weakness, and of the need you stand in of the influences of the blessed Spirit. Make it therefore your earnest request to God, to impress upon your minds a lively sense of the truth excellence and importance of those great discoveries the gospel makes ; to lay open to your view the deceitful reasonings of your hearts ; to subdue effectually
your

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your stubborn prejudices ; and to incline you to a cordial and cheerful compliance with the divine will. Fast bound as Simon was in the chains of iniquity, Peter exhorts him *to repent and pray God, if perhaps the thought of his heart might be forgiven him*¹. And our Lord himself counsels the Laodiceans, intoxicated as they were with worldly pleasures and pursuits, *to buy of him gold tried in the fire, that they might be rich; and white raiment, that they might be cloathed, and that the shame of their nakedness might not appear; and to anoint their eyes with eye-salve, that they might see*². O may this counsel of his find access to your hearts ! So will you acknowledge from your own experience, not only that *his yoke is easy, and his burden light*, but that *his ways are ways of pleasantness, and all his paths peace*³.

SECONDLY, From what hath been said we see the strong obligations which all those are under, whose hearts are well affected to the service of Christ, to make a public profession of his name. It is his express language, *Take my yoke upon you*⁴.

Religion is I know a personal thing, a matter which lies between God and our

¹ Acts viii. 22. ² Rev. iii. 18. ³ Prov. iii. 17. ⁴ Ver. 29.

own souls. Yet as there must, there will be many external expressions of it ; so this which I here mention, is of no small importance. They who believe the doctrine of Christ, ought most certainly to profess it : and they who have entered into the spirit of the gospel, ought to be found in the practice of its institutions. There are many powerful motives to excite you, Sirs, to this duty : but it may be there are considerations of no small weight on the other hand, which hold you back from it. Let me therefore attempt to set them both in their proper light. Your principal difficulty is perhaps,

1. The want of a full and clear satisfaction as to your uprightness towards God. A considerable difficulty this doubtless is.

As to those who would fain persuade themselves that they are men of God, amidst many sad and strong presumptions that they are men of the world ; the best advice that can be given them, is to forbear taking all this pains to their own real prejudice. There is in such cases little occasion for suspicion. The matter is too clear. Wherefore their business is to reflect on the misery of their condition,

condition, and to consider immediately how it is to be escaped^w.

But I am here addressing myself to persons of a different complexion, the truly serious but timorous disciples of Christ. And as to such ; it may be naturally inquired, What kind of satisfaction do you wish to have, or do you judge necessary, to intitle you to the institutions of Christ? Absolute perfection is not necessary, nor is it attainable in the present life, as you have already seen. And as to a certain assurance of your future happy state, however desirable that may be, it is not requisite to denominate you a good man. Besides, it is in the use of those means of religion, which Christ hath appointed, and to which I would persuade you, that such an assurance is only with reason to be expected.

Now the matter upon which you wish to obtain satisfaction, is reducible to these two questions ; What it is that constitutes a man a real Christian ? And, whether you answer to that character ? Upon the former

^w Τίς ὑπονοίας χρεῖα, παρὸν σκοπεῖν τί δὲ πρᾶχθηναι;
Ecquis suspicionis usus est, cum quid fieri oporteat considerare
præsto sit?

MARC. ANTON. lib. x.

question

question you are to be determined by scripture. And scripture clearly teaches, that he and he only is a genuine disciple of Christ, who believes the record which God hath given of his Son ; and convinced of his guilt and misery, embraces the promise of life and salvation through him. The effect of which will be a solemn renunciation of the base servitude of sin, a cordial desire and aim to resemble and please God, and a deliberate preference of the joys and pleasures of religion, to all the gratifications and emoluments of the present life.

And for satisfaction upon the latter question, Whether this be *your* character ? You must search your heart and try your ways. *Examine yourselves*, says the apostle, *whether ye be in the faith*^x. *Let every man prove his own work*. *Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap*. *He who soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he who soweth to the spirit, shall of the spirit reap life everlasting*^y. Now as in these inquiries, it behoves you to be strictly impartial ; so you ought not to distress yourself with suspicions and jealousies, which are unreasonable and groundless. And such are all those which arise from in-

^x 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

^y Gal. vi. 4, 7, 8.

firmities and sins, which are common to other good men as well as you; and which you daily and most heartily confess and lament before God. Do not hastily conclude from them, that you are insincere. Your earnest wish and endeavour, to detect all the latent seeds of hypocrisy in your breast, is a fair proof of your uprightness. Consider well the prevailing desires of your heart, and the general tenor of your conduct. And a due reflection on them, accompanied with your fervent cries to God for the enlivening beams of his favor and love, will be likely in a good measure to clear up your doubts upon this interesting question.

If then you have chearfully and deliberately chosen Christ for your Saviour and King, fear not openly to acknowledge yourself his subject and servant. Conscious that you lay the whole stress of your everlasting interests upon his mediation, and that it is your aim to conform to his will; you may without incurring the guilt of presumption, take place among his followers. He would not have left it in charge with his disciples, to receive such into their number *who are weak in faith*²; if he had not of his mercy received and acknowledged them himself.

² Rom. xiv. 1.

Nay

Nay the devoting yourself to his service, amidst many discouraging doubts and fears, will itself afford a noble evidence of the sincerity of your love, and the genuineness of your faith. And now this difficulty removed, you have still another, which not a little distresses you; and that is,

2. The dread of apostacy. “ Should I
“ take Christ’s yoke upon me, and after a
“ while like some others, grow weary of it;
“ should I call myself his disciple, and by
“ and by when tribulation or persecution
“ ariseth because of the word, be offended^a;
“ should I openly renounce the world, and
“ afterwards overcome by its temptations,
“ fall into foolish and hurtful lusts, which
“ drown men in perdition and destruction^b:
“ how deplorable will my condition be!
“ — my Master dishonoured! my profes-
“ sion disgraced! my fellow-disciples griev-
“ ed! and my own condemnation aggra-
“ vated beyond that of others! Should this
“ be my unhappy case, it had been better
“ for me not to have known the way of righ-
“ teousness, than having known and profes-
“ sed it, thus to turn from the holy com-
“ mandment delivered unto me^c. ”

^a Matth. xiii. 21.

^b 2 Tim. vi. 9.

^c 2 Pet. ii. 21.

But to this it is to be replied. Admitting that there is danger of your apostatizing, this consideration does not alter the state of the question respecting your duty. If you are a real Christian, as you hope and trust you are, you are bound to follow your Master in the practice of his institutions. His command is obligatory on all who believe in him. There are no restrictions in favor of those who are pressed with extraordinary apprehensions or fears of this nature. As therefore the service is to be undertaken, the difficulty and expensiveness, yea the hazard of it in your view of the matter, ought by no means to deter you from it. Besides, if this excuse is to be admitted in one instance, it is in another. And in that case, since there are no real Christians but have their fears and jealousies of themselves, there would be no professors of religion at all. And what a strange circumstance would this be ! that Christ should set up his standard, and that even his friends should none of them come in to it.

Again, it is to be remembred that this diffidence of yourself, provided it is held under proper restraints, is a consideration greatly in your favor ; and will prove a means to secure you from the danger you apprehend.

apprehend. Can there be an instance produced, of one who hath in this temper of mind enlisted under the banner of Christ; and who hath afterwards deserted his colours, and betrayed the cause? Take courage therefore, O timorous disciple of Jesus. Bid defiance to all unreasonable fears. Many a soldier whose heart hath trembled at the onset, hath behaved valiantly in the heat of the battle. You have heard also that Christ does not invite persons into his service, and then leave them to their own strength. He hath more tenderness and compassion, I may add, more truth and justice than all this. No. Your Captain goes before you, throws himself into the hottest place, and where the danger is the greatest. Nay I may add, he hath so laid his measures, and provided in such a manner against every kind of stratagem surprize or assault, that they who are heartily engaged in his interests may be assured of victory. Can you then call to mind what he hath endured for your sake? Can you reflect how deeply he hath interested himself, in the success of your feeble attempts in his service? Can you believe the many exceeding great and precious promises he hath made you, and which he is as able as he is willing to fulfil? And can you, in a

word, realize the glory which shall shortly crown all the conflicts of this your militant state? — and not cheerfully embark in his service — not most readily bow your neck to his yoke?

But there is another kind of objection, I should rather call it excuse, to be removed. And an excuse it is which reflects great dishonor upon those who make it; if indeed charity will allow them to be the real friends of Jesus. It is this,

3. That the positive institutions of Christ are matters of trifling importance, and may be dispensed with, at little or no hazard to a man's present or future interests. Strange! the institutions of Christ of trifling importance? — Blush, Christian, that ever such a word should drop from your lips; or such a thought arise in your breast. To look upon them as necessary to salvation, is indeed to affront the character of Christ as a Saviour, and to undermine the fundamental principles of his gospel. And to substitute them in the room of those weightier matters, faith mercy and judgment, is to act the part of the corrupt and superstitious Jews, which our Saviour so highly censured. But it does not thence follow that they are of little or no moment. Both the manner and the ends

of their appointment, if duly considered, sufficiently evince their utility and importance.

It was on the very night he was betrayed our Lord instituted the holy Supper, solemnly requiring his disciples to *do this in remembrance of him*^a, and leaving it in charge with them, to inculcate the frequent observation of it through every future age^c. And it was upon the memorable occasion of his ascending up into heaven, he commissioned his apostles to *go teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father the Son and the holy Ghost*; at the same time giving sufficient intimation, that he meant to extend this commission to all succeeding ministers, by adding his gracious promise, *Lo I am with you alway, even to the end of the world*^f. Nor should we forget the declaration, which immediately follows his commission in another Evangelist, *He who believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved; but he who believeth not, shall be damned*^g. By his connecting baptism with faith, in the former clause, he plainly forbids our treating that institution with indifference: and by his omitting it in the latter, we are taught

^a Luke xxii. 19, 20.

^c 1 Cor. xi. 26.

^f Matth. xxviii. 19, 20.

^g Mark xvi. 16.

not to lay an undue stress upon it, as necessary to salvation. To which it must be added that the nature and intent of these sacred rites, as they are explained in the New Testament, clearly prove them to have been designed, not only as public tests of our love and obedience, but as means to promote our comfort and edification.

What then is the spirit of their reasoning and conduct, who can allow themselves in the neglect of Christ's institutions, under the vain pretence of their being of trifling consideration? Forgive me if I say, you do in effect dispute the authority, or however censure the wisdom and goodness of Christ. You deprive yourself of one evidence at least of your sincerity. You stand excluded by your own consent, from the natural and appointed means of improvement in religion. And instead of aiding and promoting the interest of the Redeemer, you by this strange conduct greatly discourage and weaken it. And now I ask, Do not these considerations give you real pain? They will I am persuaded, if your affection for Christ is sincere and genuine. Call up to your view the infinite obligations, which his unparalleled goodness hath laid upon you. And then say what characters of disingenuity and baseness

ness your conduct will merit, if shame or sloth, or this unreasonable pretence I have been exposing, should any longer prevail to hold you back from your duty?

THIRDLY, I have now only to address myself in a few words to those who have *taken Christ's yoke upon them*, and are enrolled among his followers.

Your honor and privilege, my friends, is very great: far greater than if you were the disciples of the wisest man, or the servants of the most powerful prince on earth. It is by false measures we too commonly make our estimate of what we call real happiness and glory. The wealth and grandeur of the world strike our imagination, and the opinions and customs of mankind govern our inclinations and pursuits. But when the veil of sense is drawn aside, and faith presents to our view the adorable Jesus arrayed in all his infinite perfections; what amazing splendor does the majesty of his character reflect on the meanest of his followers? Myriads of happy spirits surround his throne; and they all account it their chief felicity to contemplate his excellencies, and their highest honor to obey his commands. Who would not wish then to make one in the

number

number of his retinue? This is your distinguishing privilege. And whatever circumstances of poverty or affliction may attend your outward condition, if he owns you for his disciples, and you bear any resemblance to him; there is more real dignity in your character and profession, than the proudest monarch can boast of, who is a slave to sin and sense. Angels congratulate you—good men love you—even the wicked themselves on some occasions revere you.

Need I after this say? Be not ashamed of the yoke of Christ—You are not. It is your highest honor; and with the great apostle you cheerfully join issue, *God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of Christ^b.* On the other hand, need I caution you to beware, how you disgrace your profession by an unsuitable temper and conduct? It is your dread: keep in mind therefore the obligations which Christ hath laid upon you, and your voluntary engagements to him. His interests and yours are united: by the love therefore you bear to him, and the concern you feel for your own happiness, be persuaded to stand at a distance from sin. You have named the name of Christ; depart therefore from all iniquityⁱ. You are the

^a Gal. vi. 14.ⁱ 2 Tim. ii. 19.

expectants of a better world ; be not therefore conformed to this^k. You are children of the light ; have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness^l.

Neither be you weary of the yoke of Christ. There are circumstances, as you have heard, which do sometimes make it painful. Afflictions of various kinds you must expect to meet with ; and animal nature is not always in a like capacity to bear them. Many active services also are required of us ; and the want of a lively temper of mind, will sometimes render them rather tedious and irksome. But be careful amidst all, that you indulge not an unkind thought of your Master, or of his service. Cultivate a sincere and cordial love to him ; and this will make you superiour to every difficulty and discouragement. It is happy to be able to say, after having tried his yoke, *I love my Master, I will not go out free*^m. Maintain daily communion with him ; and this will put life and vigor into your obedience. If ever there was a time, when Peter was tempted to think hardly of Christ's yoke, it was when *he followed him afar off*ⁿ. Neutrality in religion is dangerous. The very

^k Rom. xii. 2.

^l Eph. v. 8, 11.

^m Exod. xxi. 5.

ⁿ Matth. xxvi. 58.

first symptoms of it are therefore to be watched and dreaded. Call to mind the many enlivening exhortations of God's word ; and consider well the examples it sets before you. And pray earnestly for divine grace to enable you to persevere.

To conclude. Amidst all the fatigues and sorrows of the present life, and which attend the faithful discharge of your duty ; be comforted with the joyful prospect of a future happy immortality. *There remaineth a rest for the people of God^o.* You shall ere long cease from your labors, and receive your reward. Your Master *endured the cross and despised the shame* ; and he is now *set down on the right hand of the throne of God^p.* And he hath promised that *they who suffer with him, shall reign with him^q* ; and that *where he is there his servant shall be also^r*. O happy day, when you shall arrive at your home ! and Christ shall himself welcome you thither, with those kind and transporting words, *Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord^s.*

^o Heb. iv. 9.

^p Chap. xii. 2.

^q 2 Tim. ii. 12.

^r John xii. 26.

^s Matth. xxv. 21.



DISCOURSE VII.

The Pleasantness of Religion.

P A R T I.

PROV. iii. 17.

*Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all
her paths are peace.*

WOULD we convince men that
the service of Christ is not that
uneasy yoke, that grievous bur-
den, which through the preju-
dices of corrupt nature it is generally un-
derstood to be, it were methinks a consi-
derable

derable point gained. This however hath been attempted; and I would hope, through the blessing of God, not without some success. But must we stop here? Is it the only commendation of the religion of the heart, that it will do no one any real harm? To suppose this were surely to do it great injustice. O! no. There are divine substantial and durable pleasures attending the experience and practice of it. To prove this will therefore be our present business. And if we are so happy as to be fully and cordially persuaded of this most certain truth, we cannot fail of being captivated with its charms, and so becoming willing converts to its sacred dictates.

That Solomon is here speaking of serious religion is beyond all doubt. Nor is it without good reason that he gives it, in the preceding verses, the denomination of *Wisdom*, agreeably to his own character, and the professed design of this book of Proverbs^t. For if there be such a thing as wisdom in the world, that surely has the best claim to this description, which gives us the clearest apprehensions of God, his nature and perfections; which leads us into the most intimate acquaintance with our-

^t Chap. i. 1—4.

selves;

selves ; which instructs us wherein our true interest lies ; and which marks out to our view the path to life and blessedness. Now the wise man pronounces him *happy*, who finds this *Wisdom*, and who gets this *Understanding* ; assuring us that it is a prize infinitely more valuable than *silver or gold*, than the most *precious rubies*, or any of the delights of sense whatsoever. *Length of days*, says he, *is in her right hand, and in her left hand riches and honor*¹. To which he adds in the text, *Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.*

By the *ways* and *paths* of wisdom is meant the whole of religion, both the contemplative and practical part of it. And each of these is *peaceful and pleasant*. So they are declared to be by the unerring word of God, and so they have been found to be by the experience of the wisest and best of men. *Great peace have they*, sings the psalmist, *who love thy law, and nothing shall offend them*². And with him the beloved disciple of Jesus readily joins concert, when he tells us, that *its commands are not grievous*³, that is, they are pleasant and joyous.

But before I come to illustrate this cheerful and animating truth, I must just observe

¹ Ver. 13—16.

² Ps. cxix. 165.

³ 1 John v. 3.
that

that the text is not to be taken so restrictively, as if every good man were a perfectly peaceful and happy man ; or as if the ways of religion were all of them so easy and pleasant, as not to admit of any circumstance which is disagreeable and irksome. The reverse of this is too plain a fact to be disputed, and hath been acknowledged and accounted for in a former discourse. Perfect happiness is not to be enjoyed here : nor is it possible it should, considering the present imperfect and depraved state of things. The best of men must needs feel some painful sensations within, from that continual struggle between grace and corruption, which ever prevails in their breasts. And as from a strict observation of themselves, they find daily occasion for humiliation before God ; they cannot but on that account endure a degree of anxiety and distress, though not all that gloominess and despondency which is the sad fruit of unpardonable guilt. And then the outward disappointments and trials to which they are liable in common with others, must be a source of at least some inward affliction ; since religion does not divest them of their passions, or make them insensible to external things. To which it may be added, that God himself is sometimes

times pleased for wife ends to with-hold the enlivening influence of his grace : and when thus a dark cloud spreads itself over all their pleasant experiences, it is not to be wondered at that they are in trouble. But in neither of these instances is religion itself, strictly speaking, the *cause* of sorrow; though by reason of the corruption of human nature, and the unavoidable connections of the present life, it is the *occasion* of it. And as to those Christians, if such there be, who always wear a mournful countenance ; the greater part of their uneasiness is to be imputed either to natural constitution, or else to mistaken notions about religion itself.

Now these things considered, the difficulty with respect to the observation in the text is in a good measure removed. And after all, though it were admitted, that some of the ways of wisdom are rough and unpleasant, yet this would by no means disprove the general truth of Solomon's maxim ; since most proverbial sayings will admit of some particular exceptions, and the plain meaning of that before us is, that it is the natural tendency of religion to make men peaceful and happy.

We will now therefore proceed immediately to the illustration of this argument, which

we shall do by shewing, that the knowledge and experience of religion hath a mighty effect,

I. To remove the principal causes of disquietude : and,

II. To minister the highest occasions of joy and pleasure.

We are here speaking of the mind, which is on all hands acknowledged to be the chief seat of happiness and pleasure. If that be easy and cheerful, it is not of essential consequence what our outward circumstances may be. How then,

I. Is religion adapted to remove the principal causes of inward uneasiness ? Now these are reducible to three heads ; — doubt and uncertainty — guilt and fear — and that disorder and restlessness of spirit, which arises from the prevalence of turbulent and ungovernable passions.

i. Doubt and uncertainty. This every one knows, who hath been at all conversant with himself, is an occasion of much anxiety and trouble. Whatever be the affair we are thoughtful about, while the mind remains in suspense, it must needs be unhappy. And its unhappiness will always be propor-

proportioned to the importance of the object. Now the great principles of religion, which have for their object the well-being of mankind both here and hereafter, are surely of all other matters the most important. And of consequence whilst the mind is doubtful of their truth, it cannot but be exceedingly perplexed and uneasy. Some indeed are so stupid as to trouble themselves little, if at all, about these things. Whatever peace therefore they may fondly boast of, it is the fruit of ignorance and insensibility. Yet there is, I suppose, hardly a man to be found, but is at one time or other pressed with some such questions as these — Is there a God that judgeth in the earth? — Am I accountable to him? — Will my soul exist in another state after death? — By what measures will future happiness and misery be dispensed to mankind? These questions, and others of the like nature, will frequently arise in the thoughtful breast, and at certain seasons force themselves on every mind.

But whilst they remain questions, that is, whilst the judgment is at any loss to determine upon their truth, or is dissuaded through the violence of depraved passions, from pronouncing decisively concerning

them, a man cannot fail of being unhappy. Whilst conscience speaks one thing, and the inclinations another; whilst reason and scripture affirm, and sense and sin deny; whilst the man knows not how to with-hold his assent, and yet unwilling to yield, presses every little objection into the service of unbelief; whilst I say this is the case, how great must be the perturbation of his mind! He neither believes, nor yet disbelieves. He is bewildered with doubts, perplexed with uncertainties, tossed from one extreme to another; and in short, like the dove which Noah sent out of the ark, finds no ground on which to rest the sole of his foot.

Now the knowledge and experience of religion sets a man in a good measure free from these anxieties, allays this ferment in his breast, settles his hope on a sure foundation, puts an end to these continual struggles, and restores an agreeable composure to the mind. They who are fond of improvements in natural knowledge, are sensible enough how pleasant the transition is from doubt and uncertainty on any point, to full and clear evidence. But the pleasure here is so much the greater, as the objects of divine knowledge are more excellent and important. Let the Christian say, who by the grace

grace of God hath happily emerged out of all the darkness of scepticism, into the light and faith of the gospel ; what anxieties he hath been relieved of, and what tranquillity and pleasure he hath of consequence enjoyed. Of the great principles of religion he is satisfied upon the best evidence ; evidence of which he hath been enabled to form the clearer judgment, by having the embarrassments and restraints of corrupt inclinations corrected and subdued ; and evidence which hath received farther confirmation, from the influence he hath found these principles to have upon his heart and life.

And how pleasant must be the assent which the mind gives to the truth, when it hath thus the ready concurrence of the will, and the firm support of personal experience ! The storm in which the man had like to have been shipwrecked, now subsides. The darkness which before surrounded him on all sides, now clears up. And whatever contrary winds may sometimes blow upon him, yet having cast anchor on the promise and oath of him who cannot lie, he in some good degree rides safe and easy. This surely is a most desirable state, and shews the infinite excel-

lence of real religion, which thus collects the scattered wandering and uncertain notions of the mind as it were in one point, and so frees it from the endless perplexities of doubt and scepticism.

2. Guilt is another, and indeed the principal cause of inward uneasiness. Nor is there any anguish so sharp and pungent, as that occasioned by remorse of conscience, and the fear of God's displeasure. *The spirit of a man may sustain his infirmities, but a wounded spirit who can bear^x. Who knoweth the power of God's anger? according to his fear so is his wrath^y.* It is true the terror which guilt excites, does not in every person arise to the like height; but is proportioned to the sense impressed upon the heart of the evil of sin and its just demerit. Yet the very consciousness that we have done amiss, the bare imagination that God is displeased, and the apprehension alone of some inconvenience which our guilt may bring upon us, must needs make the mind uneasy. How can a man be happy, while there is something within which tells him, that he is not what he should be, and that he does the thing he ought not to do? While he suspects that a holy just and powerful God

^x Prov. xviii. 14.

^y Ps. xc. 11.

is his enemy, and feels some forebodings in himself of future judgment and misery?

Men do indeed by various ways attempt to relieve themselves of these uneasy thoughts; some by flying to their pleasures, and putting the evil day at a distance; and others by seeking a retreat in infidelity, or resting their hopes on a flattering notion of uncovenanted mercy. But still these fears will frequently return upon them. And it is a fact, that use what attempts they will, they cannot easily persuade themselves to believe, that they have not deserved something which is bad at the hand of God, and that a day of reckoning will not sooner or later come. Now such apprehensions, call them by what name you please, say they are the effects of madness enthusiasm or superstition; yet they must needs be very troublesome to a man, and greatly disturb his peace and comfort. They must, whenever they arise in his mind, embitter his sensual pleasures, and aggravate his worldly sorrows. *There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked: they are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt^z.*

How great then must be the blessedness of true religion, which furnishes a remedy

^z Isa. lvii. 20, 21.

for all these complaints ! Faith, that grand principle of divine life, presents to the sinner's view the amiable character of divine mercy, supported by truth and justice; shews him the altar of burnt offering, with the bleeding sacrifice of the Son of God thereon ; and then pronounces in his ears, with a small and still voice, the free pardon of all his sins through the blood of the Lamb. And thus, breaking up the springs of penitential sorrow in his heart, it relieves him of the sad and gloomy fears which before oppressed his spirits. It is guilt that haunts the mind with melancholy. That therefore must be a pleasant thing, though infidelity would call it no better than a charm, which drives the wretched spectre from the breast, and restores peace and cheerfulness to the soul. And O what—what can do this, but faith in the Lord Jesus Christ ? Worldly pleasures, or the false reasonings of self-deception, may afford some temporary relief ; but it is only temporary. The enemy quickly returns to the charge, and with a greater fury than before. But this is a shield proof against the most violent assaults of Satan. This is balm which cannot fail of healing the wounded conscience. Other remedies may fondly promise success ; yet being tried they

they are found to be ineffectual. But this assures us of relief upon the most satisfactory considerations; and as it comes recommended by divine authority, so it hath the support of innumerable examples. And how desirable the blessing, to have a calm restored to the tumultuous breast, its terrifying fears of the wrath of God removed, and peace established in the conscience upon a sure and honourable foundation! Well, such is the felicity of true religion.

To which it must be added, that it is the effectual means of preserving the Christian from a great deal of that folly sin and profaneness, into which the unbridled passions of the wicked hurry them; and consequently of securing him from a great deal of that self-condemnation remorse and torment which they feel. As it directs us to the proper cure for our guilty fears; so being cured, it teaches us how the health and tranquillity of the soul is to be preserved. Once more,

3. Another cause of uneasiness to the mind is, the restlessness and turbulency of unsanctified passions. Infinite is the mischief we suffer through these means. It is to the folly and perverseness of our own hearts, rather than the events and occurrences of life, that the chief part of our troubles is to be imputed.

imputed. How do pride envy covetousness impatience, and the like evil affections, while they hold a man in subjection to their cruel dominion, continually distress and torment him ! They cannot always be gratified : that is in its own nature impossible. And being thwarted and opposed, what a wretched tumult do they occasion ! Would we frame an idea of misery, we need only figure to ourselves the man of ambition, denied the respect and honor he haughtily claims ; or the avaritious man disappointed of his expectations, and reduced to poverty ; or the impatient and self-willed man crossed in his views and purposes. He therefore who throws the reins on the neck of his passions, and suffers them to have the controul, is his own enemy ; an enemy as well to his peace and comfort, as his honor and usefulness. Occasions of uneasiness he must of necessity meet with every day of his life, and the indulgence of his corruptions must render that uneasiness unavoidable.

Now the grace of God removes, at least in a degree, this sad cause of pain and trouble. It strikes at the root of our corruptions, and forbids them to rule and tyrannize in the heart. It renewes and sanctifies the passions. It makes a man humble contented patient

patient and ready to forgive : and so, agreeably to the prevalence of these virtues, it frees him from the restlessness and misery of contrary affections. The wicked are their own tormentors. But he who fears God, whatever pain he may endure in mortifying his irregular appetites ; yet hereby escapes innumerable anxieties and vexations, in which the indulgence of them would necessarily involve him. To this effect our Saviour speaks, when, having proposed himself as an example of meekness and humility, he assures us that by *learning of him we shall find rest to our souls*².

² Matt. xi. 29.

DISCOURSE

DISCOURSE VII.

P A R T II.

WE have seen how religion tends to remove the principal causes of inward disquietude. Let us now proceed,

II. To consider the positive joys and pleasures which accompany it. And here I shall confine myself to these three particulars — The rich entertainment it affords the understanding — The animating hopes and comforts of which it possesses the heart — And the solid satisfaction and pleasure which attend the practice of it.

FIRST, The discoveries of religion afford the highest entertainment to the understanding.

This they must needs do to a renewed mind, since for their richness variety and importance, they infinitely exceed any other whatsoever. It is the office of divine Wisdom

dom to draw aside the veil of sense, and to present to our dark and benighted minds the most amiable of all objects, the ever-blessed blessed God, the fountain of felicity and glory : to reveal to us the counsels of his grace, and the operations of his hands ; all conducted with infinite wisdom goodness and truth, and all exactly corresponding with each other : to shew us his only begotten Son, the grand medium of communion between God and men ; descending from the realms of glory, tabernacling in this lower world, leading a life of exalted piety and obedience, enduring a painful and ignominious death, bursting the bands of the grave, and in our nature ascending triumphantly up into heaven. It is the friendly office of this Wisdom from above, to point out to our view the admirable scheme of redemption, by the obedience death and resurrection of Christ ; the provisions hereby made for the honors of the divine law and government, and for the hope and confidence of every returning penitent ; and the inestimable blessings hereby procured, of pardon justification adoption and eternal life : to describe the Saviour in his personal and relative excellencies, arrayed in all the splendor of proper divinity, tempered with all the mildness and

conde-

condescension of sinless humanity, sustaining every character and office suited to the various exigencies of our present state, and intrusted with the infinitely rich and incomparable gifts both of grace and glory. It is the office of this divine Instructor, to assure us of the descent and inhabitation of the holy Spirit, with all his benign and heavenly influences; proceeding from the Father, and obtained for us through the mediation of the Son: to give us a view of ourselves, our capacities interests connections duties and hopes: and in a word, to lead us into some distant acquaintance with the world to come, the blessed spirits we are there to associate with, the business we are to be employed about, and the refined and everlasting pleasures we are to enjoy.

Now these together with many other sublime and heavenly truths, are the subjects to which religion invites our attention. And what subjects so well adapted to entertain the mind, and improve the understanding, even though we considered them as speculations only! But when we enter into the evidence by which they are supported, and reflect on their matchless excellence, and their prodigious utility; how can the soul of man fail,

fail, if in a healthful state, of feeling a se-
raptic pleasure in the contemplation of
them—A pleasure far surpassing that which
the most studious mind enjoys, as the per-
quisite of all that pain and labor which at-
tend the investigation of natural truth? This
is knowledge so noble, so interesting,
so important, that it will hardly admit of a
comparison with any other whatsoever. *I*
count all things but loss and dung, says he
who was bred at the feet of Gamaliel, *for the*
excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus
my Lord^b. Nay the wisest man that ever
lived, hardly knew how to be profuse enough
in his commendation of it, as the only source
of the truest pleasure and advantage. *Happy*
is he who findeth wisdom, and who getteth
understanding. The merchandize of it is better
than the merchandize of silver, and the gain
thereof than fine gold^c.

The joy which some have felt in their
pursuit of divine knowledge, has been so
great, that they have forgot their necessary
food, have been for a while wrapt up into
heaven, and have become insensible to al-
most every thing here below. It was a con-
templation on these subjects that so ravished
the heart of David, when in an extasy he

^b Philip. iii. 8.

^c Prov. iii. 13, 14.

cried

cried out, *How excellent is thy loving-kindness, O God^a! How precious are thy thoughts unto me! How great is the sum of them^c!* And it was in this manner, we may reasonably suppose, the great apostle was employed, when he was caught up into paradise, and knew not whether he was in the body or out of the body. Here then there is all the richness variety strangeness, and if the expression may be allowed, all the novelty which can be desired, to make this knowledge most agreeable and entertaining. Of the contemplative part of religion it may therefore truly be said, that *its ways are pleasantness and its paths peace.* But we will now go on,

SECONDLY, To the hopes and comforts of which it possesses the heart.

And here I have nothing to say of any worldly prospects of wealth honor or pleasure. I have no gay scene of glittering delights to present to the youthful imagination; nor any high cordial of sensual bliss to minister to the carnal heart. None of the great things of this life hath Christ insured to his disciples, but hath rather taught them to expect tribulation in their way

^a Ps. xxxvi. 7.

^c Ps. cxxxix. 17.

through

through it. Yet he hath not left them comfortless ; but hath provided them pleasures, which as they are spiritual, so are substantial and satisfying : pleasures adapted to cheer their breasts amidst the most painful afflictions, and to add a new relish to their most agreeable outward enjoyments. And what are they ? Why such as arise from a peaceful conscience — a sense of the favor of God — faith in divine providence — communion with heaven — and the hope of eternal life:

i. How desirable a blessing is *peace of conscience* ! The terrors of an awakened breast and of a self-accusing heart, are most dreadful indeed, as we have already seen. They spread a gloom, wherever they are felt, over all the cheerful scenes of life, unfit a man for his duties and enjoyments, impair his health, eat into his very vitals, and if not removed or at least abated, bring death and destruction after them. How happy then to have all easy quiet and serene within ! So sensible are even bad men themselves of the importance of this, that if they cannot obtain peace with conscience, that mighty enemy, on safe and honourable terms ; they will bribe him into a reconciliation, or else will try their utmost to lay violent hands upon his life.

But is it not infinitely better to have conscience in a sound healthful friendly state? Such then is the happiness of the man of religion, the man who believing in Christ, walks humbly with God in the course of his duty. Amidst his daily weaknesses and infirmities, which are also the occasions of daily sorrow and humiliation, it is his care to avoid sin. And though he dare not flatter himself with any idea of perfection, or avail himself of any supposed merit of his own before God; yet humbly hoping his heart is right with God, he chearfully sets about the business of his station, quietly submits to the disappointments he meets with, and pleasantly enjoys the fruit of his labor. *This is his rejoicing, the testimony of his conscience, that in simplicity, and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, he hath his conversation in the world*^f.

2. What substantial felicity must there be in *a sense of God's favor!* To have God for our enemy, is to be exposed to the greatest mischiefs and dangers imaginable; and even to apprehend this to be the case is very distressing. But it is the business of religion to free a man from these anxious and fear-

^f 2 Cor. i. 12.

ful apprehensions, and to possess him of the contrary views and sentiments. Faith in the gospel of Christ clears up his doubts upon those points, which are most apt to strengthen and exasperate the fears of natural conscience, such as the justice and veracity of God, the threatenings of his law, and the miseries of the present life. And while it convinces him that God can be just, when he justifies him who believes in Jesus ; it inspires a humble hope in his breast that he will be merciful to *his* unrighteousness, and will remember *his* iniquities no more. So the heavy burden which had oppressed his heart is removed ; the dark cloud which had been gathering around his mind is dispelled ; and the sun of righteousness arises upon his broken and disconsolate spirits, with healing under his wings. God becomes his friend, and in his favor is life. All his perfections are propitious to him, and he rejoices in their influence. Trusting in him as his refuge, he is secure from every danger ; and hoping in him as his portion, he is blessed with every good.

If the favor of an earthly prince makes a man's countenance shine, puts joy into his heart, and adds strength to his hands ; what

a happy effect must a sense of *his* favor produce, who reigns over the universe, and hath all things at his disposal ! It was this blessing the psalmist wished to enjoy, when amidst the sovereign contempt he felt for every thing in comparison with God, he thus poured out his soul to Heaven, *Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon me*^g. And it was the infinite pleasantness of this great blessing he meant to describe, when in the next verse he adds, *Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased*^{*}. And who can forbear envying the prophet Asaph of the happiness he so sensibly experienced, when he addressed his God in those passionate words, *Whom have I in heaven but thee ? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee*^h. And hence we are naturally led to reflect,

3. On the comfort that arises out of *a firm faith of divine providence*, which is another branch of religion. That the great God concerns himself as well about the affairs of individuals as of the world in general, is a clear doctrine of revelation, nor is there any one principle in nature to contradict it.

^g Ps. iv. 6.

* Ver. 7.

^h Ps. lxxiii. 25.

And

And how admirably is this truth adapted on the one hand, to soothe the breast of the good man amidst the perplexities and disappointments of life; and on the other, to infuse an additional sweetness and pleasure into all the unexpected successes of it! It is impossible, if his religion has that influence on his mind which it may and ought to have, but that he should stand firm in a time of trial, and enjoy a degree of composure at least, when sadness and misery sit upon the face of every surrounding object. Animated with this truly noble and rational principle, he will behave with a heroism far superior to that which is the fruit of stoical insensibility. So that amidst all the feelings of humanity, of which he is susceptible in common with others, we shall find him thus silently reasoning with himself — “ God is infinitely wise and good. The reins of government are in his hands; and he manages all things well. I am afflicted: but it is God who afflicts me, and in afflicting me he consults my good as well as his own glory. Be calm then all ye angry passions of my mind. Father, thy will be done. To thee I refer my concerns. On thee I cast my burden; for thou carest for me.” Now this temper, as it is most fit

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and reasonable in itself, so it tends to lighten the burden of our afflictions, or to strengthen us to endure it. And what is this temper but religion? To what does it owe its existence, but to the grace of God?

And on the other hand, you easily see how the flavor of every earthly enjoyment must needs be heightened and refined, by a due regard had to the influence of divine providence therein. “ This, says the good man, is a cordial sent me from heaven. “ The hand that prepares and administers “ it puts joy into it, and at the same time “ provides against any undue effect of it. “ It is the fruit of his goodness and love. “ As such I relish it, as such I acknowledge “ it, as such I would use it to his glory. “ The consideration of his kindness, whilst “ it increases my pleasure, prevents my un- “ gratefully dishonouring him, or foolishly “ injuring myself, by transferring my affec- “ tions from the giver to the bounty itself “ he thus generously bestows.” So you see how pleasant a life he must live, in whose breast the cordial belief of a providence, triumphs over all the madness and folly of atheism and infidelity. But again,

4. The pleasures of a religious life are still farther heightened and improved, by

that communion with God to which the Christian is on some occasions admitted. Happiness consists much in society. And the pleasures of society consist in a communion of sentiment and affection. And these pleasures are more or less refined and exalted, according to the excellence and perfection of those with whom we associate. Now as the pleasures which men of refined wit and learning enjoy in each other's society, far exceed that of brutal sensualists or sordid worldlings ; so, upon the very same principle, the pleasures which Christians enjoy in communion with God, may be supposed to exceed those of the wisest sages, or the most ingenious philosophers. With no one can we converse so great and glorious, so amiable and excellent as God. It is true he is a Spirit, invisible and incomprehensible ; whence communion with him may to some persons seem a very mysterious thing. Yet if among men, it be no other than a mutual exchange of ideas and affections ; why should it be thought strange, that an intercourse somewhat similar to this, should subsist between God and his people ? Why should it be thought strange, that whilst they are employed in contemplating his perfections and will, in his word and works ; and in pour-

ing out their souls at his feet, in love confidence and praise ; he should condescend to irradiate their minds with bright conceptions of himself, and to gladden their hearts with a lively sense of his favor ?

And think you it can be otherwise, than that a good man should feel inward delight and joy, in thus surveying the image of the blessed God drawn out on the works of his hands, in thus drinking in the pure satisfaction of being interested in his love, and in thus giving back his heart to God in cheerful resentments of gratitude and praise ? God is the fountain of all good. Yet the generality stop short of the fountain, and content themselves, regardless of God, with the distant streams of his bounty, and which they have first polluted with their own lawless passions. But the Christian by conversing with heaven, is led up to the source of all good, and there sometimes with expanding desires and improving capacities, takes in his fill of pure joys and refreshing delights. O happy souls who are thus for a while absorbed in God, wrapt up to heaven in holy meditations, and made to taste at least of the river of pleasure, which proceeds out of the throne of God and the Lamb ! With Peter upon the mount of transfiguration they say,

*It is good to be here!*¹ and with the two disciples, after their having been entertained with our Saviour's company to Emmaus, *Did not our hearts burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?*^k But there is,

5. One more source of pleasure which religion supplies, and that is *the hope of eternal life*. It hath often been remarked of the pleasures of this world, that they are for the most part greater in expectation than enjoyment. So that the chief happiness of even a man of the world may be said to consist in hope. And what makes this passion, when thus fixed on sublunary enjoyments, so cheerful and enlivening, is, that the objects it proposes are most agreeable to animal nature, that our imagination heightens their excellence, that we flatter ourselves we shall assuredly enjoy them, and that the possession of them seems nigh at hand. But methinks it must considerably lessen this sort of pleasure, when we reflect that experience is every day giving fresh proof of the deceitfulness of all worldly expectations, both in regard of the value of the things themselves, and the uncertainty of obtaining them. At a distance they appear excessively alluring,

¹ Luke ix. 33.

^k Chap. xxiv. 32.

but

but they sicken in the enjoyment : and when we imagine ourselves on the point of possessing them, they often elude our embraces.

Now on the other hand, though the objects of religious hope are spiritual invisible and distant ; yet faith puts a reality importance and excellence into them, which it is easy to see must heighten the pleasure arising from the certain expectation of them, greatly beyond any worldly prospect. We are sure the things to be enjoyed cannot be estimated above their real value, yea that it has not entred into the heart of man to conceive how great and good they are. The evidence of their existence will not admit of a reasonable doubt. The hope of enjoying them, if built on Christ alone and productive of purity in our lives, cannot deceive. And then as to the period of our possessing them, we know not but it is nigh at hand : the distance however, imagine it what you will, is on various accounts very trifling and inconsiderable. Does it not follow then that the hope of eternal life, thus prevailing in the breast under the conduct of a lively faith, must be fruitful of the most refined and substantial pleasure to a renewed mind ? “ It “ is such a blessed hope, that every soul
“ ought

“ ought to be charmed and transported with
“ it,” said a Heathen, even while he acknowledg-
led it to be a matter of probability only
— a kind of *venture*¹. Think then what
the Christian may be supposed to enjoy,
when faith, supported by the noblest evi-
dence, transports him beyond the line of time,
lands him on the shore of everlasting happi-
ness, and introduces him into the society
of the blessed : what he must feel, while he
beholds him who is invisible, converses with
the infinitely adorable Jesus in his exalted
state, and realizes the honors employments
and pleasures of the spirits of just men made
perfect : what joy, in a word, must circulate
about his heart, while he is told that all this
felicity and glory is his, and that ere long
he shall be put into the full and everlasting
possession of it.

Such then are the comforts with which
religion inspires the heart — peace of con-
science — a sense of God’s favor — faith in
divine providence — communion with hea-
ven — and the joyful hope of a happy im-
mortality.

¹ — Καλὸς γάρ ὁ κίνδυνος, ναι χρὶ τὰ τοιᾶντα ὥσπερ
ἐπαδεῖν εἰπεῖν. PLAT. PHÆD. p. 180 edit. Cantab.

DISCOURSE VII.

PART III.

FR OM the view we have taken of the entertainment which the great truths of religion afford to the understanding, and of the joy with which the hopes and promises of it cheer and refresh the heart, we proceed to consider,

THIRDLY, The solid satisfaction and pleasure there is in the practice of it. And here we shall have our eye both on the general temper and conduct which religion enjoins, and on the particular duties of devotion and worship it requires.

1. As to the general temper and conduct which religion teaches and recommends. It hath been already acknowledged, that some of the graces requisite to form the character of

of a good man, are, by reason of the corruption of human nature, and our particular connections and situations in life, attended with their peculiar discouragements. Repentance humility patience and self-denial, cannot be mentioned without conveying the idea of uneasiness and pain. *The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit and a contrite heart^m.* The disciples of Christ must be *poor in spiritⁿ.* We are to *crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts^o;* to *endure afflictions^p;* and instead of *avenging ourselves of those that injure us,* we are *rather to give place unto wrath, and to overcome evil with good^q.* And it is in respect of all this, as well as the affliction itself of an outward kind to which the profession of religion will sometimes expose us, that *the gate is said to be strait, and the way narrow that leads to life^r.*

But however sharp the discipline of the heart may seem, and most certainly is, yet we may safely affirm that it is not only the way to pleasure, but it hath a degree of pleasure intermixed with it. And though it is hard to gain the mastery over our lusts, yet the victory being in some measure ob-

^m Ps. li. 17.

ⁿ Matth. v. 3.

^o Gal. v. 24.

^p 2 Tim. iv. 5.

^q Rom. xiii. 19, 21.

^r Matth. vii. 14.

tained,

tained, we rejoice. He whose appetites are subdued and brought under the restraints of reason, feels greater satisfaction in a seasonable abstinence from sensual gratifications, than others do in excess. The philosopher therefore well replied, when he was blamed by his friend for not indulging himself at an entertainment, “ That he abstained for “ the same reason that the other exceeded, “ that was, for his pleasure.” So farther, though the pangs of an awakened conscience are bitter and painful, yet the relentings of ingenuous sorrow are soft and pleasing. And though persecution is far from being agreeable to flesh and blood, yet there is a sweetnes and pleasure in those sensations of divine love, which determine us to suffer for our Master rather than deny him. Nay our Saviour, by bidding his persecuted followers *rejoice and be exceeding glad*^s, supposes it more than a possible thing, for the mind of a good man to be chearful amidst the greatest outward troubles. A truth this sufficiently verified by history and experience. So that even the most irksome part of religion, if any of it may be so stiled, is not without its pleasures.

^s Matth. v. 12.

And

And then as to those *other* graces which enter into the character of a Christian, they manifestly bring their own reward with them. Faith hope and love, having the greatest good for their object, do directly tend, not to vex distress and torment, but to soothe delight and ravish the heart. We have already seen how pleasant a thing it is to converse with God, confide in him, and love him. But to descend from these the noblest exercises of religion, to the practice of its sacred dictates towards our fellow-creatures. Say, you who have walked in the ways of truth justice and holiness, and in the paths of friendship sympathy and love, Whether these are not *ways of pleasantness and paths of peace?* To a mind formed after the image of the infinitely pure and righteous God, a base and dishonourable action must be an unnatural and painful thing. How great then the satisfaction of doing unto others, as we would have them do unto us ! And how still more exalted the pleasure of doing them such acts of kindness, as they have no equitable claim to, and of which indeed there are few examples in this inhospitable world ! Say, O say Christian, is it not a pleasant thing to go about doing good ? Have not you often felt the truth of what was frequently

frequently on your Master's lips, That it is more blessed to give than to receive^t? Is there not a peculiar sweetnes and agreeableness in that compassion, which makes you a sharer with all around you in their distresses? And does not that love, which knits your hearts to your fellow-christians in the sacred bonds of divine friendship, make you truly happy? Wherein consists the chief felicity of heaven, but in the tender endearments of pure love, and the substantial joys of mutual benevolence? What then is this part of the practice of religion but the beginning, the budding, the early dawn of that bliss? In short, What grace is there which the bible recommends, whether it respect God ourselvses or one another, which has not as well the most powerful charms to captivate a renewed heart, as it hath the most forcible arguments to convince an upright mind? And if there be this solid satisfaction and pleasure attending the general temper and conduct which religion enjoins; the like may be truly affirmed,

2. Of the particular duties of devotion and worship. There is little indeed in the forms of religion themselves that is either pleasant or profitable. Wherfore it is not to be won-

^t Acts xx. 35.

dered

dered at, that they who neither understand their meaning, nor enter into the spirit of what is expressed by them, should soon grow weary of them. Nor is it to be doubted that most men would intirely lay aside positive duties, if it were not for the force of education and example ; and if the tediousnes of them were not in some fort compensated, by the external pomp and ceremony which human authority has annexed to them. But however disagreeable the forms of religion may be, in all their native simplicity, to a carnal mind ; yet the spirit of vital godliness infuses a real pleasure into them : so that those services which would otherwise be dull and irksome, become chearful and entertaining.

Will you say, Christian, it is a hard service to profess your faith in Christ and your subjection to his authority, by being baptized into his name, and attending on the memorials of his death ? No. It is rather in your apprehension pleasant, thus to express your cordial affection to his person and interests, and your infinite obligations to his compassion and love ; especially when he deigns to crown these institutions, with his gracious and enlivening presence. Will you say that prayer is a tedious lifeles unavailing exercise ? No. You will give a very diffe-

rent account of it, when you have been pouring out your heart in public, in the family, or in the closet, with that faith contrition and fervency which the nature of this duty requires. I will add, to read the scriptures, to hear them explained, and to unite with others in praising God for his manifold goodness, are services as entertaining and pleasing to a good man, when in a proper frame of mind, as they are instructive and useful. These things speak for themselves. A heart duly impressed with the truth excellence and importance of the great concerns of religion, cannot but taste, on some occasions at least, a peculiar sweetness in these divine and spiritual exercises. *O how I love thy law!* says David, *it is my meditation all the day*^a. *It is sweeter to me than honey, and the honeycomb*^b. *Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage*^c. *How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts?* My soul longeth, yea even fainteth for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God. Blessed are they that dwell in thy house: they will be still praising thee. *A day in thy courts is better than a thousand:* I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of

^a Ps. cxix. 97.

^b Ps. xix. 10.

^c Ps. cxix. 54.

my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness⁷.

Thus have I endeavoured to prove to you the pleasantness of religion, from a contemplation of the reason and nature of the thing, and from the concurrent testimony of wise and good men. It tends to remove the principal causes of inward uneasiness and trouble, such as doubt and uncertainty, guilt and fear, and the restlessness and turbulency of unsanctified passions. And it ministers the highest occasions of joy and pleasure: it affords the richest entertainment to the understanding; it possesses the heart of the most animating hopes and comforts; and there is solid satisfaction in the exercise of its several graces, and the practice of its several duties.

Let us now make some improvement of the subject.

1. How very unfair is their account of the ways of Wisdom, who represent them as rough tiresome and unpleasant! But who are they who bring us this report of them? They are either such as have never walked in the ways of religion, or those who if they have taken a few steps therein, have quickly turned back. Wherefore they are incompe-

⁷ Ps. lxxxiv. 1, 2, 4, 10.

tent judges, and so not to be regarded. Besides, they are prejudiced in favor of the world, and their own depraved inclinations; and so their testimony is partial, and on that account not to be credited. They are indeed the majority ; but since they speak a language contrary to reason itself, and to the sense and experience of the wisest and best men, this consideration ought to give no weight to what they say. If it was criminal in the Israelites to pay greater regard to the report of the ten spies, who were sent to search out the good land, than to that of their two fellows Caleb and Joshua ; it is still more criminal in us, to give heed to the calumnies of those who know less of religion, than those others could be supposed to know of the fair and pleasant country of Canaan. Do not therefore believe them, when they tell you that the sure way to be unhappy, is to be religious.

And as to those truly good men, who by their gloomy countenances and reserved behaviour, give others an unfavourable opinion of the ways of God ; it is to be remembred that those appearances are owing, either to some fault in their natural temper, or to their having been more conversant with the difficulties than the pleasures of religion.

If

If indeed their deficiency in point of mirth and jollity, is the consideration whence you infer that they are unhappy, you reason very falsely. These are insufficient and mistaken proofs of real chearfulness and pleasure. *The laughter of the fool,* said the wise man, *is as the crackling of thorns under a pot*^z. There may be, and there generally is, more solid satisfaction and comfort in that man's heart, who is of a grave countenance and sober deportment, than in his who hath little else to recommend, him except the gaiety of his external appearance. But admitting that there are some Christians of a peculiarly reserved and forbidding carriage, this is to be imputed, as I said, to their natural make: and it is not to be questioned that if they had known nothing of religion, these ill qualities would notwithstanding have been sufficiently expressed in their behaviour. And even though it be a truth, that the unpleas-
ant air we see on their countenances, is sometimes owing to the sorrowful feelings of their hearts; yet if you ask them, they will freely tell you, that all these their sad complaints arise from the remains of unbelief and sin, and not from any real defect in religion itself. *That they firmly believe is*

^z Eccles. vii. 6.

the most chearful enlivening thing in the whole world ; and they have found it so, on some occasions at least, in their own happy experience. It is therefore an unfair account of the ways of Wisdom, that they are all rough tiresome and unpleasant. The contrary hath I hope been fully proved. Let me however, before I dismiss this particular, caution the real friends of Jesus to guard against such an appearance and deportment, as may at all contribute to strengthen the prejudices of ignorant and worldly men.

2. If the ways of religion are peaceful and pleasant, what pity is it that they are so little frequented ! Multitudes we see flocking down the broad road to destruction, while this which leads to eternal life, is considered as a bye and gloomy path. Mournful reflection indeed ! A reflection which sometimes saddens the heart of the compassionate Christian amidst all his joys. O that men were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their own true interests ! Be persuaded, O vain and foolish man, to spend a few moments in comparing the way you are in, with that I have been describing. And then let your reason and conscience decide the question, which of the two is most eligible,

The way you at present chuse may have its pleasures. It is broad strait and smooth. You endure perhaps little weariness in travelling this road. It is easy to the flesh, and admits of gratifications to which your corrupt nature is strongly prone. You meet with few to molest and trouble you ; but on the contrary many who earnestly solicit you to go forwards. The company you like. And the scenes which open upon you as you pass, are very enchanting ; especially while the bright beams of prosperity gladden your way. But, admitting that it were as pleasant a road as imagination can represent it, and that you were scarcely ever to feel any thing within to disturb or make you uneasy ; yet if after a few months or years, it should hurry you into a land of misery darkness and despair, how foolish as well as wretched will your choice have been ! That this hath been the sad lot of many who have gone before you, is not reasonably to be questioned. There is a faithful witness, I mean him that cannot lie, who tells you as you pass on the way, that the end will be shame and ruin^a. And not a few, while they have stood trembling at the gates of death, have loudly warned the multitudes who were crowding

^a Rom. vi. 21.

after them, of the miseries approaching. If therefore you were to credit their testimony, or only to advert to it as a probable matter ; methinks you must needs be unhappy. But however this may be, tell me if your own experience hath not pronounced the gratifications of sense unsatisfying ; if you have not often felt disappointment and vexation amidst your most eager pursuits ; and if the bitter reflections of your conscience on some occasions, have not more than balanced all your transient joys and pleasures ?

And now turn your eyes to the paths of Wisdom, or let the men who have trod them describe them to you. They seem at first view perhaps, narrow dark and thorny, and in some respects they may be so. Few frequent them, and of those few some are not so cheerful as might be expected. Yet upon the whole this is a safe peaceful and pleasant road. It is the way of truth and holiness ; and *the way-faring man though fool*, is assured he *shall not err therein*^b. The company that use it are all of them the excellent of the earth. Their temper is meek and gentle, and their deportment inoffensive and good. *Their bread is given them*, to use the language of the prophet, *and their wa-*

ters are sure^c. In the wilderness waters break out, and streams in the desert : the parched ground becomes a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water^d. They have peaceful consciences, contented minds, thankful hearts, and sometimes joys which the world cannot give nor take away. Christ is their guide, and his providence their defence. The word of God is their rule, and *his statutes are their songs in the house of their pilgrimage*^e. In these paths the wisest and best of men have trod. And *the end, the certain end, is everlasting life*^f. And now say, Which of these two is most deserving of your choice, the way of sin or of holiness ; that which leads to happiness, or that which goes down to misery ? *Who so findeth me, says Wisdom, findeth life, and shall obtain favor of the Lord. But he who sinneth against me, wrongeth his own soul : all they who hate me love death*^g.

3. If we are any of us acquainted with the ways of Wisdom, how thankful should we be to that kind and skilful hand, which hath led us into these peaceful and pleasant paths ! The traveller who hath missed his way and is in danger of being lost, feels no small joy at the sight of a guide ; nor can

* Isa. xxxiii. 16.

^d Isa. xxxv. 6, 7.

^e Ps. cxix. 54.

^f Rom. vi. 22.

^g Prov. viii. 35, 36.

he be enough grateful to the friendly stranger for conducting him safe, through an easy and cheerful road, to the place whither he is going. What sentiments then of love and gratitude should possess our breasts, when we reflect on the kind and seasonable interpositions of divine grace in our favor? We had not only missed our way, but were going down heedlessly, it may be presumptuously, the path which directly leads to destruction. In these sad circumstances did the blessed God pity us? Did he by his providence, by his word, and by the gracious influence of his Spirit, stop us in our career, convince us of our danger, point out the way to happiness, and guide our feet into it? Have we found it a pleasant path? Has he vouchsafed us his presence and company therein? And are we in hopes ere long of arriving at the celestial city, and there enjoying perfect and endless felicity? O what praise is due to his free and unmerited goodness! Free and unmerited I call it; for such we shall readily acknowledge it to be, when we reflect on our own folly and perverseness, when we cast our eyes on the miseries of those who are yet in their sins, and when we consider the amazing price of our redemption, and the various means by which we are formed and

and prepared for future happiness and glory.
Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits. Who forgiveth all thine iniquities: who healeth all thy diseases. Who redeemeth thy life from destruction, who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies^h. Who maketh thee to lie down in green pastures; who leadeth thee beside the still waters; and guides thee in the paths of peace and righteousness, for his name's sakeⁱ.

4. Let us see to it that we forsake not these paths, which we have found to be thus cheerful and pleasant. Indeed it is hardly to be imagined that they who have enjoyed the comforts of religion, will ever deliberately consent to part with them on any worldly consideration whatever. *Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him, says our Saviour, shall never thirst^k. His eager and criminal gust for the things of this life will be in a good degree subdued. And having drunk and relished the old wine, as it is elsewhere expressed, he will not straightway desire new: for it will ever be his settled judgment, that the old is better^l. Yet many temptations will arise in the course of our profession, to divert our attention from*

^h Ps. ciii. 2, 3, 4.

ⁱ Ps. xxiii. 2, 3.

^k John iv. 14.

^l Luke v. 39.

the interesting concerns of religion, and to pall our appetite to its joys and pleasures. As we pass on our way, Satan and the world will use their utmost efforts, to draw us again into the paths of vanity and sin. And what through the corruption of our own hearts, and the depression of our animal spirits on some occasions, we shall now and then be put to a stand to know what to do. It is therefore of great importance, that we are upon our guard against all these assaults of the enemy. To that end let us endeavour, by frequent reasonings with ourselves, and by maintaining daily communion with God, to get our judgment and experience still more and more confirmed in this grand leading point, on which I have been discoursing, *That the ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths peace.* Thus obstinately fixed in our attachments to religion, and thus feeling the comforts of it at our hearts, we shall not be easily moved from our stedfastness. But like the Samaritans we shall be able to say, *Now we believe, not because of the saying of this or the other person: for we have heard and conversed with him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world*^m.

^m John iv. 42.

Let

Let us also make it our fervent and constant request to him, who first led us into the paths of righteousness, to guide and guard our steps therein.

5. And lastly, If the way to heaven is so pleasant as hath been represented, let us think, and frequently think with ourselves, how pleasant the country must be to which it leads. It is not in my power fully to describe it, or in yours to frame an adequate idea of it. *Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him*ⁿ. Peace of conscience, a sense of God's favor, faith in his good providence, communion with heaven, and the hope of eternal life, are sources of real comfort to the Christian in his way through this world. But O how will they be refined and improved when he gets to that better world ! While we are passing on towards our home, we are not without our refreshments and pleasures. Even the services themselves which are required of us, however painful they may seem, bring their own reward with them. And though we may now and then be greatly dejected and cast down ; yet at other seasons our hearts are

ⁿ 1 Cor. ii. 9.

revived

revived and comforted. It is pleasant, fatigued and weary as we may sometimes be, to drink of the distant streams of that river which makes glad the city of God ; to taste of the grapes of Eshcol ; and from mount Pisgah to take a view of the good land. It is pleasant to converse with our guide about the way we are led, and the country to which we are going ; and to join with our fellow-travellers in the cheerful songs, with which they entertain one another in the house of their pilgrimage. It is pleasant, in a word, to anticipate the joys of heaven, and by faith and hope to transport ourselves for a while to that blissful place.

But O what are these comforts, what are these pleasures, when compared with those reserved for the weary pilgrim when he is got to his journey's end ! *There remaineth a rest for the people of God^o.* *In my Father's house, says Christ, are many mansions : I go to prepare a place for you^p.* *The ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads ; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away^q.* What inconceivable pleasure will they feel, from the hearty welcome which the Lord Jesus Christ, and his

^o Heb. iv. 9.

^p John xiv. 2.

^q Isa. xxxv. 10.

attending

attending saints and angels, will give them ! What infinite satisfaction, to find themselves instantly relieved of all their complaints ! And what rapturous joys, at the prospect of those delightful and improving exercises of friendship and devotion, in which they are to be for ever employed ! They are at home. O blessed state ! The country is fair and fruitful. The inhabitants are all holy peaceful and happy. God himself dwells among them ; and in the enjoyment of his favor and presence they possess a never-ending duration of bliss and glory. *So shall they ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words*¹.

* 1 Thess. iv. 17, 18.

DISCOURSE

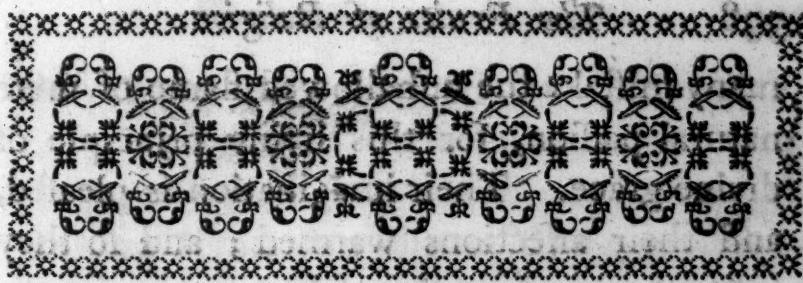
DISCOURSES

The Author of *Religion and
Science* and *Truth and
Error*

Vol. I.

BY JAMES R. HARRIS

MEMPHIS,
TENNESSEE,
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THE AUTHOR,
1883.



DISCOURSE VIII.

The Fruits of Religion.

P A R T I.

ROM. vi. 22.

— *Ye have your fruit unto holiness.* —

TRUE religion wherever it prevails, infuses a certain vital heat or energy into the soul, which fails not to produce some substantial effects in a man's temper and conduct. It is however to be feared, that too many

many mistake the unhallowed flame of mere natural passion, for this living principle of divine grace. Their imagination is pleased, and their affections warmed ; and so they instantly conclude themselves men of religion. But alas ! the genuine spirit of those truths for which they profess so high a regard, is overlooked and forgot : and their zeal, like a flaming meteor, having for a while drawn the attention and wonder of all around them, suddenly expires in perpetual darkness and oblivion. Or if their pretensions to religion do not thus quickly vanish and die away ; perhaps other consequences follow, which are still more fatal and dangerous. When the tumult of their passions is somewhat subsided, and they are pressed with the utility and importance of real holiness ; they begin coolly to persuade themselves, that a profession of the gospel may consist with their lusts. Until at length it becomes a settled point with them, that they may be allowed to sin — horrid impiety ! — because they are not under the law but under grace.

Such kind of persons there were in the primitive times ; and this their unnatural abuse of the gospel the apostle exposes at large in this context. Nor is it a little remarkable,

that

that the manner in which he combats the false reasoning of these men, while it sets their perverseness and ingratitude in the most striking light, furnishes a strong presumptive evidence in favor of the doctrine of grace.

*Shall we sin because we are not under the law, but under grace?** As if he had said, “The constitution of the gospel is such, that it may seem at first view as if it countenanced sin. Men of corrupt minds may turn the grace of God, so amazingly displayed in the free pardon and justification of a sinner, into licentiousness. But be assured this is not the spirit, the tendency of that doctrine, which you have been taught; nor will it admit of any such conclusion. So far from it, that this very consideration of your not being under the law but under grace, is a reason why sin should not have dominion over you.”

Nor does the apostle content himself with this general reasoning upon the matter; but appeals to the religious affections of their hearts, in support of his argument. They had felt the powerful influence of the gospel, to move them to obedience; and so had approved themselves real Christians, men of sound and genuine religion. Whereas ye

* Ver. 15.

were the servants of sin, ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you; and so being made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness*. And then reminding them of the miserable fruits of that obedience they had formerly rendered to sin, even shame and death, he tells them in the text, the case was now happily altered; for being delivered from the dominion of sin, and become servants to God, they had their fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.

The metaphorical phrase of having fruit or bearing fruit, when applied to the actions of men, evidently supposes a certain principle from whence those actions proceed, and which gives them their true and proper denomination in the sight of God. Now as in the general, there will be a correspondence or similarity between the one and the other; so the course or tenor of a person's life, is represented in scripture, as the best index of the state of his mind. Upon this maxim our Saviour reasons, when he would guard us against wicked and designing men, who under a pretence of extraordinary piety and goodness, attempt to deceive and mislead us. *By their fruits ye shall know them.*

* Ver. 17, 18.

*Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit, but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit: neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit*⁴. It is God's prerogative alone to judge the heart: nay as to the actions of others, we are very incapable in some instances of pronouncing decisively upon them, for want of clearly understanding the motives from whence they arise. But it is an unquestionable truth, that his heart cannot be right with God, the course of whose behaviour is unholy and sinful. And on the other hand, ignorant as we are of men's hearts, we are obliged to give full credit to their profession, if their conduct is answerable to it. And indeed a sense of our own liableness to err, and a disposition to think well of others, will induce us, if we are men of religion, to put a favourable construction on actions which are doubtful, and even in some respects blame-worthy.

Now the question is, What are those *fruits* we are to expect from a real Christian, and without which a man's pretensions to that character, be they what they may, are vain

⁴ Matth. vii. 15—18.

and groundless? The apostle comprehends them all in the general idea of *holiness*: a word of much the same import with *righteousness* in the preceding verses. It stands opposed to sin, and signifies a conformity of our tempers and lives to the will of God. When we speak of it as a principle, we mean a fixed approbation of the things which are excellent and good, and a prevailing inclination or tendency of the heart to those things. And when we speak of the fruits of it, we mean all those various acts of the mind and of the external conduct, which spring from this principle, and are in their nature and quality conformable to it.

Now the holiness of a Christian is at present, in neither of these views perfect: far from it. His judgment indeed is firmly established in favor of that which is good, and his heart is strongly inclined that way. But still he hath many evil passions and propensities to struggle with. Hence the apostle complains of *a law in his members, warring against the law of his mind*^w; and of *the flesh lusting against the spirit*^x. Nor is there a good man living, but daily laments, and often in the bitterness of his spirit, the folly and corruption he feels work-

^w Rom. vii. 23.

^x Gal. v. 17.

ing

ing within. The powers of sin and holiness, like the houses of Saul and David, are continually at war with each other. And of consequence the fruits of holiness, that is, the various expressions of it in the thoughts and reasonings of the mind, and in the actions of the life, will be imperfect likewise. Hence the many weaknesses failings and sins of those, who nevertheless upon the whole, give satisfactory proof that their hearts are upright before God.

Thus much premised, I proceed now to describe the natural and genuine fruits of religion; and to shew you, as I go along, how they arise out of this principle of holiness, quickened and invigorated by the animating motives the gospel suggests. They are reducible to these three heads, the duties we owe — to God — to one another — and to ourselves. Let us,

I. Consider the several expressions of religion which are required of us towards God. The first I shall mention is,

FIRST, Thinking of God.

God is the great object of religion : and they who enter into the spirit of it, are well affected towards him ; or to use the lan-

guage of scripture, they have *his fear in their hearts*^y. Now a thoughtfulness about God, or the frequent adverting of the mind to him, is a natural expression of this fear. Nay without such consideration of him, there cannot be that admiration of his excellencies, that confidence in his power and goodness, and that devotedness of heart to his service, which enter so deeply into the essence of religion, and are the chief sources of delight and pleasure to a renewed mind. It is the character of the wicked, that *God is not in all their thoughts*^z. They do indeed sometimes think of him; but it is sorely against their will, and upon those occasions only when providence forces the idea of him upon their consciences. On the contrary, it is the character of the man of religion, that *he sets the Lord always before him*^a. He not only lays it down as a settled principle with him, that God sees him, and that therefore he ought to act as in his sight; but he is apt to think of him. His attention is quickly turned towards this great object, by circumstances which have not the like effect on other men — Now there is a general, and occasional recollection of God, and a more steady and particular contempla-

^y Jer. xxxii. 40.

^z Ps. x. 4.

^a Ps. xvi. 8.

tion of him : each of which is a natural and proper expression of religion.

1. As to the former. It is true we cannot be thinking of God every moment : that, as we are at present circumstanced, is impossible ; nor is it indeed necessary. Yet there are many things continually occurring, which if we are well affected towards him, will be likely to bring him to our remembrance. Our enjoyments and afflictions, our temptations and difficulties, our dangers and escapes, yea our follies and sins, will be apt to have this effect. The good man, sensible that he is a pensioner on the divine bounty, can scarcely feel the want of any blessing, or have that want agreeably supplied, without calling to mind his benefactor. Such pious reflections as were common with the good old patriarchs on these occasions, will every now and then pass across his breast. — *The God who hath fed me all my life long unto this day^b!* — *The Lord who hath dealt graciously with me^c!* — *How unworthy am I of the least of all his mercies^d!* — When he resolves upon transacting any important affair, he can hardly forbear saying with the apostle James, at least in his heart, *If the Lord will, I shall*

^b Gen. xlviij. 15. ^c Chap. xxxiii. 11. ^d Chap. xxxii. 10.

live,

live, and do this or that^e. When any cross event happens to him, he quickly recollects that the hand of Providence is in it. Is David affronted by Shimei? how instantly does the thought occur! *The Lord hath bidden him*^f. If any matter of difficulty arises, which requires extraordinary prudence and fortitude; he will naturally send up a wish to heaven, as did Nehemiah while he stood before the Persian king^g. Is he assaulted with temptation? the idea of that great Being who is every where present, will be apt to strike an awe upon his spirits; and he will silently reason with himself like Joseph, *How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God*^h? Or if he has been overtaken with sin, the remembrance of God will follow close upon the remembrance of his sin; just as Peter, whenever he recollects his denial of Christ, recollects also the expressive look which Christ gave him, and which drew tears of genuine sorrow from his eyesⁱ.

But it were endless to enumerate the various circumstances, which will lead a serious mind thus occasionally to think of God. Nor need I stay here to shew you how naturally these thoughts and reflections

^e James iv. 15.

^f 2 Sam. xvi. 11.

^g Neh. ii. 4.

^h Gen. xxxix. 9.

ⁱ Mark xiv. 72.

on God, arise from that fear which he is said to put into the heart. They are as genuine expressions of religion, as on the contrary the frequent taking God's name in vain, which is no other than speaking without thinking of him, is an expression of profaneness and irreligion. — But it is farther to be observed, that the fear and love of God will incline the Christian,

2. To a fixed and close meditation of him, on particular and special occasions. God is to be seen in all his works, whether of nature providence or grace. But alas ! how few observe him ? Some are so continually busied about the affairs of the world, or so deeply immersed in sensual pleasures, that they consider not at all the operations of his hands. And others of a more refined taste, amidst their many curious and perhaps useful speculations, are unmindful of the first great cause of all things. But it is not so with the man of religion. He is an inquirer after God, and cannot be content without finding him. Now, *though God is not far from every one of us*, and at the first glance on his works, we may perceive striking proofs of his power and goodness ; yet *we must seek him, if haply we may feel after him*.

him and find him^k. Divine knowledge, with all the happy fruits of it, is not to be attained without close attention and diligent application. *The works of the Lord are great, and sought out by all those who have pleasure in them^l.* Wherefore religion prompts the Christian, to withdraw from the world at proper seasons, to impose silence on his tumultuous thoughts and passions, and so to engage his heart to approach unto God. A difficult work this often is, through various causes that might be mentioned; yet in the issue we shall find it infinitely profitable and entertaining. Nor should the consideration of God be confined to our retirements only. It should be the business of conversation, when a fit opportunity offers; and always our professed object, when we attend upon the solemnities of public and social worship.

Many examples of this sort we meet with in scripture. *Enoch walked with God^m,* that is, he thought of him and conversed with him, as well as aimed to do his will. *Isaac went out into the field at eventide to meditateⁿ*—to meditate doubtless of God and his

* *Acts xvii. 27.*

¹ *Pf. cxii. 2.*

² *Gen. v. 22.*

³ *Chap. xxiv. 63.*

works,

works. The wakeful hours of the night David employed in divine contemplations^o. And his great object in frequenting the house of God was, that he might behold the beauty of the Lord, enquire in his temple^p, and there be employed in thinking of his loving-kindness^q. Not can you well forget how they are commended, who in the time of the prophet Malachi, speak often one to another, and thought on the name of the Lord^r. — Now this is a just and natural expression of real piety, as it evidently supposes a firm belief of God's existence and presence, a sincere and affectionate love to him, and a humble hope and confidence in his mercy: and as it plainly evinces an ardent concern to have these divine principles quickened and established in the heart.

SECONDLY, Addressing ourselves to God is another eminent expression of religion.

A duty this which the light of nature, as well as scripture, clearly teaches. Prayer is the offering up our desires to God; and is generally considered as including in it, an acknowledgment of our dependance on God, and his infinite perfections, thankfulness for

^o Ps. lxiii. 6.

^p Ps. xxvii. 4.

^q Ps. xlvi. 9.

^r Mal. iii. 16.

his various mercies, a confession of our manifold sins, and a supplication of all needful blessings for ourselves and others. I shall not enter into the many frivolous objections which have been made to this duty. The question as to the fitness or propriety of addressing the Deity, may be safely rested with the simple dictates and feelings of every man's reason and conscience. Besides, scripture hath put the matter beyond all doubt with those who assent to its divine authority.

— Now the qualifications of acceptable prayer are, either those which enter into the essence of it, or those which are only adventitious or circumstantial.

1. As to the former ; they are these, a due regard to the Being whom we address, a proper sense of our own condition and wants, faith in the mediation of Christ, and a humble hope of the aid and influence of the holy Spirit. He who prays aright must have his thoughts reverently employed about God, and his mind suitably impressed both with the greatness and goodness of that infinite Being. *He must believe that he is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him*^{*}. He must be deeply affected with his own frailty guilt and un-

* Heb. xi. 6.

worthiness,

worthiness, with his absolute and intire dependance on God, with the excellence and importance of the great blessings he implores, and with a grateful remembrance of the many favors he hath received. He must have a lively and affectionate confidence in the merit and advocacy of Christ, for the success of his prayers. And while he humbly supplicates the assistance of the holy Spirit, which is the chief good that God bestows, he must be sensible of his need of the divine influences, and of the encouragement given him to expect them. Now these tempers suitably exercised in prayer, are the natural and proper expressions of religion. Nor is there any one devout affection of the heart, but may be excited and gratified in the due practice of this duty.

And then,

2. As to those other qualifications, which may on some accounts be called circumstantial; a due regard to them is a natural dictate of religion, and furnishes a clear proof of its prevalence in the heart. The man of religion will make conscience of secret prayer, sensible of his own immediate and personal concern with God, and desirous of using a freedom with him peculiar to such private intercourses. Enter thou

thou into thy closet, says our Saviour, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father who seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly^t. He will also consider himself obliged to social prayer, that is, to join with his family and his Christian friends in solemn addresses to God. To which he will be prompted by a firm persuasion of the importance of such exercises, not only to the interests of religion in general, but to his own personal edification and comfort. The primitive Christians *continued with one accord in prayer and supplication*^u. And the apostle exhorts the Hebrews *not to forsake the assembling of themselves together, with a view doubtless to this duty among others, as was the manner of some*^v. He will pray frequently, urged to this exercise not by conscience only, but by the pleasure and profit resulting from it. *Continue instant in prayer*^x. *Pray without ceasing*^y. On certain occasions he will judge it his duty to set apart special time for humiliation and prayer, and for thanksgiving and praise; of which we have numerous examples both in the Old and New Testament. Nor will he be an utter stranger to

^t Matth. vi. 6.^u Acts i. 14.^v Heb. x. 25.^x Rom. xii. 12.^y 1 Thess. v. 17.

those

those short silent ejaculatory addresses already hinted at ; and which are not only in themselves most fit and reasonable, but are likewise recommended by several instances on divine record.

Now a transient reflection on the genius and spirit of real religion will quickly convince us, that the addressing God after the manner which hath been represented, is a natural, and I may add a necessary expression of its existence and prevalence in the heart. If breathing is a clear proof of animal, so is prayer of spiritual and divine life. Nor is it easy to conceive how that man who is truly sensible of his dependance on God, and feels a cordial affection towards him, can pass on contentedly from day to day in the neglect of this duty : especially since God hath so solemnly enjoined it, and given so many encouragements to it.

THIRDLY, A due regard to public worship is another expression of religion.

Next to the existence of God, there hath not been one point more generally assented to, than that he ought to be worshipped. And since we all stand in the same relation to him, as reasonable and dependant creatures, and are under mutual obligations to

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each other; it is likewise agreed on all hands, that the worship of God should be public and social. Whence it happens that go where we will, we see some place of general concourse devoted to the service of the Deity. Wherefore they who treat public worship with contempt, or allow themselves in the neglect of it, act in direct opposition to one of the plainest dictates of reason, and to the common sense and profession of mankind.

But we are not left to the general reasonings of nature and conscience upon this matter. We have the express authority of scripture to oblige us to obedience; and we have particular directions given us therein, as to the manner in which God will be worshipped. It was the practice of good men in the earliest ages of the world, *to call upon the name of the Lord*^z. And we hardly need be reminded, what particular regard was paid to this great duty, under the Jewish dispensation. The mode of worship indeed which then prevailed is now changed. But social religion itself is as much in force as ever. Our Lord hath solemnly required his disciples to assemble for the worship of God. And his apostles have taken particular care,

^z Gen. iv. 26.

to caution them against indifference to the divine command. *Where two or three, says Christ, are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them*^a. We are to assemble. This we are to do, be our situation number or outward circumstances what they may, provided it be any way practicable. We are to assemble *in the name of Christ*, that is, as Christians, in obedience to his command, and with a particular regard to him in what we do. We are to meet together frequently, at stated seasons, and on every proper occasion that offers. And when we are thus convened, the services to be performed, as appears from the precepts and examples of the New Testament, are prayer and praise, instruction and exhortation, and the celebration of the two Christian institutions. Nor can I forbear adverting a moment to the gracious and condescending promise annexed, and which affords the noblest encouragement to social religion. *I am in the midst of them.* There is amazing dignity and goodness in the expression. “I their almighty Saviour and “Friend am among them — among them “not as a witness only of what passes; but “as one of the company to gladden them

^a Matth. xviii. 20.

“ with my presence, and to put life and pleasure into these divine exercises, by my influence and grace.”

Now, who that considers the reasonableness of the service itself, the authority by which it is enjoined, and the infinite utility and pleasantness of it, when crowned with the enlivening presence of Christ ; but must acknowledge that it is a very important branch of duty ? Wherefore a regular serious and cheerful attendance upon it, is a just and natural expression of religion. A good man cannot allow himself in an habitual and wilful neglect of it. Nor can he be contented with mere forms, unanimated by the genuine spirit of vital godliness. He may not always have the like relish for devotional exercises, nor be always alike benefited by them : but it will be his grand object, *to worship God who is a Spirit, in spirit and truth*^b. Whence it follows that our regard to public worship, is one good criterion, among many others, by which to judge of the state of religion in our hearts. Again,

FOURTHLY, Obedience to the will of God is another eminent expression of religion.

^b John iv. 24.

It were endless to enumerate the various duties incumbent on us, and which arise out of the several relations in which Providence hath placed us. Be they however what they may, the will of God signified to us in various ways, is our grand obligation to the performance of them. But alas ! such is the weakness and degeneracy of human nature, that perfect obedience is absolutely unattainable in the present life. Wherefore the question here is, What kind of obedience that is which may be stiled the genuine fruit of religion, or which is necessary to denominate a man a real Christian ?

i. It is an obedience which hath an immediate respect to the will of God. Many there are who in some instances do the thing which is right ; while at the same time the divine authority is quite out of the question. They are wholly moved by interest, and perhaps worldly interest too. Now in actions of this sort there is nothing of religion. And upon this consideration, great numbers of a decent outward behaviour, are excluded from the denomination of good men. But there is an intimate and necessary connection between true morality and religion^c. The real Christian

^c — οτω τα δόγματα σù ἔτοιμα εχε πρὸς τὰ τὰ
δέια καὶ αὐθαπίνα εἰδέται, καὶ πᾶν καὶ τὸ μηκόταλον οτω
ποιεῖν.

tian will have regard to God in his obedience. The question with him in every doubtful matter is, What God would have him to do? And with David he sincerely prays, *Teach me thy way, O Lord, and lead me in a plain path*^d. And hence we commonly stile such a person a conscientious man. Many indeed of the more plain and common offices of life, will be performed by him without his thinking immediately of God. Yet his regard to that great Being will clearly appear in those instances wherein his duty and interest clash; and in matters too which are out of the view of others, and wherein he cannot be influenced by motives of honor and applause. Again,

2. It is an obedience which springs from a love of God, and a desire to please him. Men who have no true sense of religion, may nevertheless have a regard to God in some of their actions. This is frequently the

ποτεν, ὡς τῆς ἀμφοτέρων ἀρὸς ἀλληλα συνδέσεως μεμ-
νυμένον. ἔτε γέ αἱθράπινόν τι ἄνδ τῆς ἐπὶ τὰ θεῖα
συναναρροᾶς εὑ πράξεις, ἔτε ἐκπαλίν. — Ita tu dogmata
in promptu apud te habeas, quorum ope res cum divinas
tum et humanas dignoscas; et rem quamque, etiam levissi-
mam ita peragas, ut qui memineris duo ista esse invicem con-
nexa. Neque enim, homines quod spectat, quicquam recte
egeris sine habito ad res divinas respectu; nec vice versa.

MARC. ANTON. lib. iii.

^d Ps. xxvii. 11.

case. As particularly in those instances, wherein the evil avoided is of such a nature, as to force upon the conscience a dread of the extraordinary displeasure of God. So the idea of God in an oath will oblige some men to speak the truth, who are not over scrupulous of a falsehood on common occasions. In like manner, when persons are under convictions of sin ; a regard to God, though their hearts are not really changed, will hold them back from many evils they have been used to commit, and prompt them perhaps to many good actions, which before this were wholly neglected. Herod was a wicked man : yet he *feared John, and observed him, and for awhile did many things*^q. But in these cases, they are influenced by a slavish, not an ingenuous fear of God ; as sufficiently appears from the unwillingness and irregularity of their obedience. Now the reverse of this is the characteristic of that obedience which religion teaches. It proceeds from love to God, from a sincere and ardent wish to please him, and from a clear conviction of the intrinsic excellence of real holiness. A good man accounts it his highest happiness to be like God, feels a real pleasure resulting from a sense of his favor, and

^q *Mark vi. 20.*

is allured to a compliance with his duty in instances that are self-denying, by a recollection of God's mercies, especially that of his redemption by Jesus Christ. So the general course of his obedience is regular and cheerful. Which leads me to observe,

3. That it is universal. Many there are who would readily obey God in some instances, if they might be allowed to gratify their evil passions in others. And upon this principle, that a partial submission to the divine authority will be acceptable; we see them commuting with Heaven for grosser sins, by a few trifling acts of penance and self-denial. But it is otherwise with the real Christian. As his obedience is the fruit of love, so it hath regard to the whole will of God. *Then shall I not be ashamed*, said the psalmist, *when I have respect to ALL thy commandments*^r. He can indeed keep none of them aright, that is perfectly; yet he would gladly conform to every one of them. Follow him into his most secret recesses, and you will there find him under the influence of this principle, as well as in the midst of his worldly transactions. Look into his heart, if that might be, and you will see him deeply lamenting his vain thoughts and

^r Ps. cxix. 6.

irregular passions, as well as his external actual sins. And then again,

4. Sensible of the manifold imperfections attending his obedience, he renounces the most distant idea of meriting the favor of God thereby. He *does justice and loves mercy*, but at the same time he *walks humbly with his God*^s; and having *done all which was commanded him*, he readily acknowledges that he is *an unprofitable servant*^t. His salvation he well knows is of grace, through the sacrifice and righteousness of Christ. Wherefore he ventures not into the presence of God, with any other plea than that which his almighty Saviour and Friend hath put into his lips. — Such is that general obedience to the will of God, which religion teaches. But the noblest expression of real piety is,

FIFTHLY and lastly, The using our endeavours to advance the glory of God in the world.

By glorifying God I mean the displaying his perfections to the view of our fellow-creatures, in order to excite their reverence for God, and to animate them to his service. Now to this every Christian in his mea-

^s Micah vi. 8.

^t Luke xvii. 10.

sure contributes, by walking agreeable to his profession. While our *light so shines before men, as that they may see our good works, they will glorify our Father who is in heaven*^a. But there is something more required of us, besides that general obedience I have been describing. We are to exert ourselves, as our abilities will admit, to spread the knowledge of the truth, to promote the cause of virtue and holiness, and to save men from temporal and everlasting ruin. The means indeed by which these great objects are to be attained, are too numerous to be particularly recited here: or I might tell you of the many private offices of Christian friendship we owe to each other, of the maintenance of family religion, of the encouragement of public worship, and of the contriving and carrying into execution schemes of public and general utility. By their prudence zeal and activity, some persons, and those too in no very eminent stations of life, have rendered amazing services to the interests of truth and religion. So that when Providence hath removed them hence, their names have been embalmed in the breasts of thousands, who have reaped the happy fruit of their labors.

^a Matth. v. 16.

Now

Now such endeavours to glorify God are noble proofs of real religion. There can be no doubt but those are Christians indeed, who stand at a distance from sin, because it is displeasing to God ; and who lament their daily infirmities, on this account chiefly, because he is dishonoured thereby. Who feel pain at their very hearts, when the gospel of Christ is reproached, through the ill conduct of any of its professors ; and in the dust expostulate with God on these sad occasions, in the language of Joshua, *What wilt thou do, O Lord, unto thy great name?*^w Who forget their own honor and interest, when those of God and religion are at stake ; and who account it their highest felicity to be the instruments of spreading the truth, and of saving the immortal souls of men.

Thus have we considered the several *fruits of holiness*, which have an immediate respect to God. Let us now seriously examine ourselves upon these matters. Religion is an important reality. It does not consist in mere speculation and profession. It must, it will, wherever it prevails, produce suitable effects in mens tempers and lives. How stands it then with us ? — Do we think of God ? — Do we address our-

^w Joshua vii. 9.

felves

selves to him ? — Do we attend on his appointments ? — Is it our concern to be obedient to his will ? — And are we pleased with every opportunity that offers to advance his glory in the world ? — Every good man will, I am sensible, have innumerable defects and imperfections to lament before God. But if these matters are the objects of our attention and pursuit, we are Christians indeed ; and having thus *our fruit unto holiness*, we shall have the testimony of those around us, that we are *the servants of God.*

DISCOURSE

DISCOURSE VIII.

P A R T II.

THE duties required of us towards God have been considered : and we now go on,

II. To the duties we owe to one another.

These, of whatever kind they may be, result from the several relations which Providence hath established among mankind ; and approve themselves upon due reflection, to every one's reason and conscience, as most fit and proper. Now they are all reducible to the general idea of justice ; which is therefore considered by some as perfect or imperfect. By perfect justice is meant the rendering to every man what is strictly and truly his own. And by imperfect justice, the rendering him that good which is purely the effect of courtesy or kindness. The for-

mer he may demand. The latter is his due only upon the general principles of benevolence. But waving this distinction, and taking the general term of justice in its common acceptation ; I propose to discourse of the several social duties under the three heads of—*Justice*—*Peaceableness*—and *Goodness* : and to shew you, as we go along, our obligations as Christians to these fruits of holiness. The subject is copious ; I must therefore confine myself to the leading ideas only.

FIRST, *Justice.*

As man is made for society, we must of necessity have various mutual intercourses with each other. And as these intercourses are by words or actions ; so justice requires that in the former we should have a strict regard to truth, and in the latter, to righteousness. We must render to every one his due. And what that is may be pretty easily known, if men will but listen to the dictates of reason and conscience. But alas ! it too often happens that reason is perverted by prejudice, and conscience over-ruled by interest. Admitting however that difficult cases may arise, yet there is a plain rule our Saviour hath laid down, which if duly regarded, will scarcely ever fail of giving a

right direction to our conduct. *All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them*^x. It cannot be expected I should enumerate the various instances, to which this rule may be applied. Its use however in the general will upon the slightest reflection clearly appear. Self-love makes men very jealous of their own rights, and very expert in fixing their own dues. We should therefore put ourselves in the place of him we are concerned with, and then ask what our demands would be. Such should be the practice of magistrates and people, of parents and children, of masters and servants, of the buyer and the seller. So should we be enabled to judge impartially what is our duty in every relation of life. Nor would it be possible for us, did we thus judge, to err widely from the path of righteousness.

But the matter lies chiefly with conscience. For acts of injustice proceed more commonly from the depravity of the heart, than any defect in the judgment. If the mind is well principled, there will be a uniform and steady regard to truth and justice, in the general course of a person's conduct. A man of religion hath a court of equity distinguished

^x Matth. vii. 12.

2

in his own breast, whose authority will extend to all his actions — to those which are not cognoscible by the civil magistrate, as well as those which are. He will not allow himself in any thing which appears to him unjust; though the doing it may expose him to no temporal inconvenience whatever. Nay, in matters that are doubtful, he will chuse to give the turn of the scale rather in favor of his neighbour, than of himself. — Now for the illustration of the several duties of truth and righteousness, let us consider them in reference — to the persons — the properties — and the characters of our fellow-creatures.

1. As to their persons. Justice requires that we are harmless and inoffensive, decent and civil, in our behaviour towards all men. We are to be careful that we do nothing whereby our neighbour may be injured, in his body or his mind, directly or indirectly, by any immediate act of violence, or by our ill advice example or influence. But on the contrary we are to shew him all the regard that is his due, that is, to contribute what lies in our own power to the health ease and prosperity, both of his outward and inward man. When we see him in any danger, we are to rescue him from it. And when

we

we have an opportunity to do him any real service, we are chearfully to embrace it. And our obligations thus to act towards individuals, are to be estimated by the nearness of our relation to them, by the particular situation we happen to be in, and by the abilities and influence we possess.

2. As to our neighbour's property. Justice requires that we defraud no man of his substance, either by open violence, or by art and collusion ; but that we *render to every one his due, tribute to whom tribute, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor* is due. We are to *owe no man any thing*^y ; but to *have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly*^z. The magistrate is to protect the subject in the enjoyment of his liberty and property ; and the subject is to do all proper homage to the magistrate, and to support and assist him in the execution of his office. The servant is to act with all fidelity towards his master's interest ; and the master is properly to reward the servant's labor and integrity. And so persons in trade and businesf are to keep their contracts inviolable, and not to over-reach or deceive one another ; but in

^y Rom. xiii. 7, 8.

^z Heb. xiii. 18.

all their transactions to do as they would be done by. Thus we are to be true to our engagements, faithful to our trusts, and fair in our dealings. — There is a justice also due to our benefactors, which is to be expressed by a grateful acknowledgment of the favors we have received, and every suitable return our circumstances will admit of. And then again,

3. As to the characters of men; an equitable regard is to be paid to them. Too many there are, who though they dare not rob their neighbour of his substance, yet do not think much of taking from him his good name. But if a good name is better than precious ointment, if it is more valuable to an honest man than any worldly possession whatever, yea I may add than life itself; to deprive him of it, or to take measures to that purpose, is an act of the most cruel and atrocious injustice. The man of religion therefore will be so far from bearing false witness against another, that he will be cautious how he insinuates any thing to his disadvantage. Nay he will be inclined to put a favourable construction upon actions that are doubtful, and even upon those which may be in some respects blame-worthy.

Put

Put them in mind, says the apostle to Titus, to speak evil of no man^a.

And now methinks I hardly need remind you of the mighty influence of real religion, to produce these fruits of righteousness in our tempers and conduct towards each other. Wherever that prevails, there will most certainly be a principle of truth and justice deeply rooted in the heart. And that will secure a man not only from what is strictly unjust and wicked, but from what is mean and base. A fraudulent oppressive and ungenerous action he will detest, while on the contrary he will take the highest pleasure in actions that are just honourable and good. As to the injuries which men offer to one another's persons, they are usually the effect of undue anger and resentment. But the grace of God will teach and enable the Christian to check and restrain his tumultuous passions, and so to forbear the consequences of them. Covetousness is the source of all the dishonesty and fraud there is in the world. It puts men upon invading each other's property, and eagerly grasping at every opportunity, however unfair, of becoming rich. But religion will mortify our hearts to the world, or at least so far bridle our

^a Tit. iii. 2.

covetous desires, as effectually to secure us from doing injustice to our neighbour's property. In a word, envy and malice are the true causes of slander and detraction, and of all that cruel abuse which is sometimes offered to innocent and virtuous characters. But here also religion will have its influence. It will subdue these diabolical passions, and so prevent the injury which may thence result to our neighbours reputation.

And then the considerations which religion suggests to the mind in favor of truth and justice, are of the most persuasive and animating nature. The ever-blessed God is *a God of truth, and without iniquity : just and right is he^b.* *Justice and judgment are the habitation of his throne : mercy and truth go before his face^c.* Striking displays he has given of these his perfections, in various instances of his conduct towards mankind ; but especially in our redemption by Jesus Christ. An event which is the astonishment of angels as well as men ! In order to secure the rights of his government, and to make way for the return of the holy Spirit to these temples he had righteously forsaken ; he sent his Son into our world, to obey the law we had broken, and to suffer the penalties

^b Deut. xxxii. 4.

^c Ps. lxxxix. 14.

of it in his own person on the cross. What an amazing expression of justice was this ! God has thus declared *his righteousness for the remission of sins*^a. He has told us, with a voice which speaks louder than that which condemned legions of rebel-angels to chains of darkness and fire, that *he is just while he justifies him who believes in Jesus*^c. And who can give full credit to this, and not feel the warmest resentments kindled in his breast, at the very idea of fraud oppression and injustice ?

This same Jesus also who was thus the Minister of God's justice, did himself, while here on earth, set the fairest pattern of truth and righteousness. So far was he from injuring any man's person, that *he neither strove nor cried, nor was his voice heard in the streets*^f. *He rendered to Cæsar the things that were Cæsar's, and to God the things that were God's*^g. And there was no guile, no falsehood or detraction, found in his mouth^h. And if we view him in the character of Mediator, presiding over the kingdom of providence and grace ; we shall see him swaying his scepter with truth and justice. *He judges the people with righteousness, and the poor*

^a Rom. iii. 25.

^c Ver. 26.

^f Matth. xii. 19.

^b Mark xii. 17.

^h 1 Pet. ii. 22.

*with judgment*¹. In a word, there is *a day coming in which we are assured he will judge the world in righteousness*². A day wherein he will bring every secret thing to light, will weigh the characters of men in a just balance, and dispense rewards and punishments to all with an equal hand. — What powerful considerations are these to influence the tempers and regulate the conduct of all such who are Christians indeed! — Let us now proceed to the next branch, of social duty I proposed to explain and enforce. And that is,

SECONDLY, *Peaceableness.*

By peaceableness I mean a disposition to live upon terms of friendship and good-will with all around us, and the use of proper endeavours to that end. This indeed is an object which, however desirable, cannot always be attained. Whence the apostle says, *If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men*³. So violent, in some instances, are the prejudices of the wicked against those of the opposite character, that it is not in the power either of prudence or good-nature, to subdue their cruel and unreasonable resentments. What we have

¹ Ps. lxxii. 2.

² Acts xvii. 31.

³ Rom. xii. 18.

therefore

therefore to do in these cases is to detach ourselves from all connections with such persons. And if still we cannot escape their malevolence, we are to endure it with patience. As to some good men likewise, it is possible that their natural tempers, and an obstinate attachment to some peculiarities of their own, may forbid our having a strict intimacy with them. We are however to cherish good-will towards them, and to be ready on all occasions to do them offices of kindness. — There are instances also in which it is unlawful to cultivate peace with others. This is the case when peace is not to be enjoyed, but at the expence of truth and holiness. The dearest connections are to be sacrificed rather than sin indulged. And truth having been once bought, is to be parted with on no consideration whatever. Yet we should not forget in the former instance, to mingle charity with justice; and in the latter, moderation with zeal.

Thus much premised, I go on now to explain and illustrate the two main expressions of this temper. They are these — the living in peace ourselves — and the promoting it as much as possible among others.

1. The good man will himself cultivate peace with all around him — with men in general, but especially with his relations and his fellow-christians. He will *seek peace and pursue it*^m. To this end, he will carefully avoid giving offence to any, by an unsuitable behaviour towards their persons, their properties, or their reputation. So the apostle admonishes the Corinthians, *to give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God*. And the admonition he enforces with his own example, *Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved*ⁿ. That is, he endeavoured to accommodate himself to all, in matters that were indifferent, and so far as was consistent with a good conscience. The peaceable man will study the capacities tempers and circumstances of others, and suit himself to them accordingly. He will lay a restraint on his passions, and exercise forbearance and self-denial, for the sake of peace. So did Abraham, upon occasion of a dispute between his servants and Lot's, which had like to have broke the harmony that subsisted between the two families. He

^m Ps. xxxiv. 14.

ⁿ 1 Cor. x. 32, 33.

faid

said to Lot, *Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee ; for we are brethren. If thou wilt take the left hand, then will I go to the right ; or if thou depart to the right hand, then will I go to the left*^o. And if it so happens that his brother is offended with him, though without cause, he will feel pain till the difference is composed.

And as he will be thus cautious how he gives offence, so he will not be forward to take it. He will be apt to put the most favourable construction on the words and actions of others, and not hastily to conclude, when he hath received an injury, that it was intended. He will *suffer long, and not be easily provoked*^p. Or if the affront be real and wilful, he will not be implacable. The wisdom that is from above, is *peaceable gentle and easy to be intreated*^q. But of the duty of forgiveness we shall have occasion to speak afterwards. — Such is the temper and conduct of the peaceable Christian, in regard of his own personal connections. In like manner,

2. He will endeavour to the utmost of his power, to promote peace among others. *Blessed are the peace-makers*, says our Sa-

^o Gen. xiii. 8, 9.

^p 1 Cor. xiii. 4, 5.

^q James iii. 17.

viour, for they shall be called the children of God'.

Unity among his own immediate friends and acquaintance, it will be his aim to preserve, and when it is at all broke in upon, to restore. To this purpose he will carefully avoid every thing, which may tend to set persons at variance, or may, though undesignedly, enflame their passions and resentments. He will not busy himself in the affairs of others, or officiously intermeddle with their disputes. The character of such unhappy and dangerous persons the apostle particularly describes in one of his epistles. *They learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle but tattlers also, and busy bodies, speaking things which they ought not*.¹ And yet every proper opportunity to compose differences he will readily embrace, using all the prudence tenderness and influence he is master of, to that end. He will labour to convince the parties concerned, of the great folly and evil of contention, of their obligations to peace, and of the honor they will gain by mutual submission and forgiveness. He will persuade them to avoid repeating grievances, to set as much as possible down to the ac-

¹ Matth. v. 9.

² 1 Tim. v. 13.

count of misunderstanding, and to put the most favourable construction upon doubtful circumstances. And, in a word, he will observe inviolable secrecy, rememiring what the wise man says, *A whisperer separateth chief friends*^t; and, *Where there is no tale-bearer the strife ceaseth*^u.

He will likewise use his endeavours to cultivate and promote peace in the church of God. The importance of this to general edification the apostle represents in several of his epistles, exhorting Christians *to follow after the things which make for peace*^w; and *to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace*^x. To this end, he will pray for the peace of Jerusalem. He will set a peaceable example before others. He will countenance every thing which tends to promote union and friendship. He will take pains, as far as his influence reaches, to suppress jealousies uneasinesses and contentions, in their first appearance. And if yet the peace of the community is disturbed, he will interpose his best offices of counsel and persuasion, to heal the breach, and to restore harmony and love.

^t Prov. xvi. 28.

^u Chap. xxvi. 20.

^w Rom. xiv. 19.

^x Eph. iv. 3.

And

And then again, the preservation of the public peace is an object, to which he will contribute what lies in his power. Considering government as an ordinance of God, he will hold it his unquestionable duty to render all proper submission to it. Obedience he will cheerfully yield to the higher powers, in every matter which consits with the allegiance he owes to Heaven: and that *not only for wrath's sake*, that is, in order to avoid the displeasure of the magistrate, *but for conscience sake*^y. And for the same reason, he will labour to promote loyalty fidelity and union, among his fellow-subjects. — These are the main expressions of a peaceable disposition.

And now let me shew you in a few words, how true religion assists us in the practice of these duties, and by what considerations it excites us to them.

It assists us in these duties, by inspiring us with *prudence* to govern and regulate our conduct. He who is well-skilled in self-knowledge, will derive thence the most important maxims cautions and directions, to guide him in all his social intercourses. And these will be of no small use to guard him

^y Rom. xiii. 5.

against

against strife and contention, if not to qualify him for the difficult office of making peace. — *Humility* is an eminent branch of religion. And how this tends to promote peace I hardly need say. Pride usually goes before contention, is the cause of it, mingles itself with it, and hath the main influence to foment and increase it. Humility on the contrary, wherever it prevails in all its genuine simplicity, precludes occasion for strife; or if strife is kindled, by its kind and gentle offices quickly puts it out. — *Contentment* is another Christian grace. And its effect on the matter now before us, is not one of the least advantages which result from it. While an ambitious covetous restless spirit, by prompting persons to improper and dangerous pursuits, almost unavoidably hurries them into disputes; an easy quiet contented temper keeps the good man out of the way of these evils, or if he does at any time fall into them, enables him quickly to extricate himself. He hath not those eager expectations to gratify; and so being contented, is peaceable. — *Meekness* also is an amiable fruit of religion. And its direct tendency to beget and promote peace, appears at first view. There would be no contentions and divisions, if it were not for

that sharp angry fierce temper, which is too common to mankind, and which is apt to be excited and provoked by disappointment or contradiction. This it is that kindles the flame, this that spreads it, and this that often renders every endeavour to quench it ineffectual. But the grace of God restrains this impetuous passion, yea corrects and softens it. It infuses, at least in a degree, a certain mildness and sweetness into a man's disposition, which prevents his wilfully offending another, and enables him to bear injuries, to put up with them, and to forgive them. — *Love* is also another genuine fruit of the spirit. And among the many expressions of this divine temper, that of peace is not an inconsiderable one. Goodwill to others will not allow me to quarrel with them, if I can any way help it. And cordial affection to them will in a manner render me incapable of contention; or at least of such contention with them, as shall have a mixture of malevolence in it. It will shut up the avenues of the heart against jealousy and suspicion. Of if they force their way, it will put me upon contriving every possible means to elude and escape them. Or if after all I am really injured, love will make the breach occasioned thereby more intolerable than

than the injury itself. *Charity suffereth long, and is kind; is not easily provoked; thinketh no evil; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things*². — In a word, that *zeal* for the glory of God which religion inspires, will have a mighty effect to aid the Christian in the practice of this duty. He who makes peace his object, purely from a principle of self-love, and an aversion to noise and clamor, will sometimes find his natural easiness of disposition mastered by the contrary passions of anger and ill-will. But here religion will step in to the relief of the Christian, just beaten and subdued. “ Shall I yield to the unpeaceful resentments of my breast? No. The glory of God, the honor of my profession, the interest of my fellow-christians, are all concerned in the issue of this quarrel. *The kingdom of God is in peace, as well as righteousness*³. I will therefore submit.” And by submitting he conquers. — Thus is a peaceable temper the natural and genuine fruit of a principle of religion in the heart.

Nor should I forget to mention the motives which religion suggests to excite us to the practice of this duty. God is a God of peace. Christ is the Prince of peace. The

² 1 Cor. xiii. 4, 5, 7.

³ Rom. xiv. 17.

message he brings us from heaven is of the most kind and peaceful intention. In order to make peace between God and us he became an inhabitant of this quarrelsome world, submitted to a thousand indignities from the sons of strife, endured the contradiction of sinners against himself, and offered his life a sacrifice to divine justice. And thus in him we see righteousness and peace embracing and kissing each other. At his entrance into the world, the friendly angels sung, *Peace on earth, and good-will to men* *. During his stay therein, he set the most amiable example of peace and gentleness before his followers, bidding them learn of him for he was meek and lowly in heart. And at his departure out of the world, he broke down the wall of partition between Jew and Gentile, reconciling them to God and to each other in one body by the cross. To promote this great design of peace he is gone up in our nature into heaven, hath taken the affairs of providence into his hands, erected his kingdom in the hearts of his people, and promised them the spirit of peace and consolation. This temper I have been describing, is represented in scripture as one of the fruits of the Spirit ; and religion as consisting much in the practice of it. *The*

* Luke ii. 14.

Wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated: and the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace, of them who make peace^b. On the contrary, the having bitter envying and strife in our hearts, is said to descend not from above, but to be earthly sensual and devilish^c. Innumerable advantages result from the cultivation of peace, to individuals families societies and kingdoms. *Behold how good and pleasant it is, for brethren to dwell together in unity^d!* They who possess this happy temper *are the children of God^e.* And to them are promised all the joys and pleasures of the heavenly world, where perfect union and undissembled friendship for ever reign. What powerful arguments these to persuade us to a peaceable temper and conduct! — It remains now that we consider those duties which are comprehended in the idea,

THIRDLY, Of *Goodness*. A general term this which is applicable to all acts of *Forgiveness* — *Mercy* — and *Love*.

1. *Forgiveness*. I mention this expression of goodness first, because the object towards

^b James iii. 17, 18. ^c Ver. 14, 15. ^d Ps. cxxxiii. 1.

^e Matth. v. 9.

which it is extended is the least deserving of it.

I must not stay here to enumerate the various kinds of injuries we may suffer from others. It should however be observed, that they *all* come within the view of the duty I am recommending. What I mean is, that the greatness of an offence will not itself justify our being implacable to the offender. It should also be remarked, that through weakness, partiality to ourselves, and the violence of irregular passions, we frequently err in our account of injuries. That is, we sometimes imagine ourselves injured, when we really are not : we sometimes impute the evil we suffer to a false cause, or to the wrong author : we sometimes hastily conclude it to be designed, when it was owing merely to mistake : and we sometimes rate the offence done us too high, and take not into our view those considerations, which would greatly mitigate and soften it. Now these matters should all be well weighed, in order to regulate our temper and conduct towards him we are required to forgive.

But admitting that we are really injured, and in a high degree, the question arises, What is our duty towards him who hath so injured us ? I answer, To forgive him.

There

There are however certain qualifications of forgiveness, which should here be mentioned.

As to those who are not sensible of the wrong they have done us, and so do not repent of it, nor make any retaliation for it; there is a sense in which *they* are to be forgiven. Revenge is a malignant temper, and is in no case to be allowed. The reverse of this therefore our Saviour teaches his disciples, in his sermon on the mount^f; desirous that they should excel in that mild and gentle disposition, of which he was so fair a pattern. And the apostle charges us not to avenge ourselves, but rather to give place to wrath^g. It may indeed be necessary for the public good, that some kinds of injuries should be prosecuted with rigor. Yet even in such instances, there should be no mixture of personal malice or resentment. But where this is not necessary, and the injury is of a more private nature; the duty required of us is to lay a restraint upon our passions, and to preserve as much as possible the calm possession of ourselves. We are to exercise forbearance, and to make all reasonable allowance for natural temper provocation and other circumstances which may

^f Matth. v. 38—41. ^g Rom. xii. 19.

have given occasion to the offence. Mild and prudent methods are to be taken, to convince the offender and to bring him to a sense of his evil. And though he is not to be wrought upon by any of these measures, we are nevertheless to wish him well, and to persevere in our endeavours to do him good. *If thine enemy hunger feed him : if he thirst give him drink*^b. So David overcame Saul. And so the forgiving grace of God overcomes the rebellious hearts of sinners.

And then as to such who are really sorry for the injury they have done us, and sincerely wish to be reconciled to us ; we are cordially and chearfully to forgive them ; that is, to pass over the offence, and to be upon the same terms with them as before. *If thy brother repent, forgive him*ⁱ. “ Instead of taking any advantage against him, or reproaching him with his faults, or insisting upon hard terms of agreement ; meet him, embrace him, rejoice over him, and be henceforth in perfect amity and friendship with him.” So should we comfort him, to use the language of the apostle in a case of a different kind, *lest he be swallowed up with over much sorrow* : and so should we confirm our love to-

^b Rom. xii. 20.ⁱ Luke xvii. 3.

wards him^k. Nor is the repetition of an injury any reason why it should not be pardoned, provided our brother acknowledges it and is sorry for it,^l *If he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him*¹.

And now what powerful motives does religion suggest to animate us to the practice of this duty ! The light of nature teaches it, and by many arguments enforces it. It is a striking passage of the famous heathen emperor and philosopher, “ Do the immortal Gods, for so many ages, not only patiently bear with the sinners that ever have been, many and great as they are ; but also do them good in every possible way ? And dost thou who art but for a moment, think it hard to bear with them, and that notwithstanding thou art thyself one of them^m ? ” But such is the darkness and perverseness of the human mind, that the reasonings of philosophy upon this point, have often proved imperfect and erroneous,

^k 1 Cor. iii. 7, 8.

^l Luke xvii. 4.

^m Οἱ δεοὶ αὐταντοὶ ὄντες, ἐδιχεράνθησιν, ὅτι ἐν τοστῷ
αιῶνι δένος ἀνθεῖ πάντως ἀεὶ τοιέπειν ὄντων καὶ τοστῶν φαι-
λων αἰέγεδαι προσέτι δὲ καὶ κίνδυνοι αἰτῶν πατέοισε. οὐ
δὲ ἵσσον εἰδέπω ληγεν μέλλων, αἴπανδᾶς; καὶ ταῦτα, τις
ἂν τῶν φαύλων;

MARC. ANTON. lib. vii.

feeble and ineffectual. The gospel however not only sets the duty of forgiving our enemies in its proper light ; but furnishes a motive to excite us to it, which is peculiar to itself, and of the most generous and animating nature. *Be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you*ⁿ. How plain and simple the exhortation ! How noble and divine the argument with which it stands enforced ! God forgives the greatest offenders, and innumerable offences. He forgives most heartily and sincerely, yea he takes pleasure in forgiving. He forgives men for the sake of Christ his Son, whose sufferings and death he hath accepted as a compensation for their offences. And he not only remits the punishment due to them, but receives them into his favor, treats them as his friends, and delights in doing them good. So that his conduct serves both for a rule to direct us in our duty, and a motive to influence us to it. And what an amazing effect has it had, in some instances especially, to soften men's resentments against each other, and to melt their hearts into tenderness and love ! The compassionate Jesus also, hath set us an example of for-

ⁿ Eph. iv. 32.

giveness,

giveness, as well as recommended it by his instructions. *Father,* said he when expiring on the cross, *forgive them, for they know not what they do*^o. Nor should I forget to observe that this temper arises out of the nature of true religion, is one of the fruits of the spirit, and furnishes a striking proof, where it prevails, of our having passed from death to life.

2. *Mercy.* This is another expression of goodness; and the duties of it rise in respect of their obligation, because the objects of mercy are to be considered not like those of forgiveness, in the character of offenders, but purely as afflicted and miserable.

Now mercy is that affection of the mind by which we feel the distresses of our fellow-creatures, and become disposed to assist and relieve them. Various are the temporal calamities to which mankind are liable. Here we shall see one reduced, perhaps on a sudden, from circumstances of affluence and honor, to the depths of poverty want and wretchedness — There another lamenting the untimely dissolution of his dearest and most intimate connections in life — And there a third racked with excruciating pains of body, or languishing on a bed of

^o Luke xxiii. 34.

sickness and death. And what are the offices of mercy in these and other sad instances that might be described? The man of this temper feels with the miserable what they feel; and if he can do no more, drops a tender tear of commiseration over their pains and sorrows, and minglestherewith his fervent cries to Heaven on their behalf. But if he has it in his power, he instantly stretches forth the hand of benevolence, and gratifies one of the most pleasing affections of the human heart, by ministering to their wants. *He will not say to a brother or sister that is naked and destitute of daily food, Depart in peace, be thou warmed and filled; and at the same time give them not those things which are needful to the body*^p. Mercy is full of good fruits. She will feed the hungry, cloath the naked, visit the sick, and according to her ability afford succour to every kind of distress. Nor can the offices of mercy be better described than in the language of Job: *When the ear heard me, then it blessed me. When the eye saw me, it gave witness to me; because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me, and I caused*

^p James ii. 15, 16,

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the widow's heart to sing for joy. I put on righteousness, and it cloathed me; my judgment was as a robe and a diadem. I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame; I was a father to the poor, and the cause that I knew not I searched out; and I brake the jaws of the wicked, and plucked the spoil out of his teeth.⁹

Mercy hath respect also to the spiritual as well as temporal distresses of mankind. And these are great — they are many. How sad a sight to behold a soul, an immortal soul, a soul of more worth than the whole world, in danger of perishing for ever ! A soul capable of the knowledge of God, and yet wholly ignorant of him! — formed for substantial pleasures, and yet destitute of any relish for them ! — appointed to perpetual existence, and yet without a hope, a wish, a thought beyond the grave ! — on the brink of eternity, and yet secure and easy ! — in a word, laden with guilt, and yet fearless of punishment ! So sad a sight as this, when beheld with a steady eye, cannot fail to pierce the heart of the compassionate Christian. Viewing a friend, a brother, a child in these deplorable circumstances ; he sheds tears of real sorrow over

⁹ Job xxix. 11—17.

him,

him, addresses his fervent cries to God for him, and most ardently wishes, by his counsef influence and example, to become the happy instrument of his salvation. Such was the temper which inspired the breast of the great apostle, and expressed itself in those memorable words respecting the Jews, *My heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they may be saved*¹. — *I have great heaviness, and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh*². — Thus have I delineated the features of this amiable grace, and pointed out the several duties it teaches and inculcates.

Nor need I take pains to shew you, that these various offices of mercy are the proper and genuine fruits of religion. To be humane and compassionate is a dictate of nature — a principle so generally approved, that few care openly to renounce it. Nay some men, who are otherwise of a dissolute character, have very tender feelings for the distressed. But how is the natural sympathy of the heart refined and improved, by a deep sense of religion, and a firm belief of the great truths it reveals! God is merciful. We have daily convincing proofs of it. His

¹ Rom. x. 1.

² Rom. ix. 2, 3.

providence

providence kindly sustains us amidst all the miseries we suffer, and compassionately protects us from a thousand dangers to which we are every moment exposed. Yet these expressions of divine mercy, great as they are, vanish as it were into nothing, when compared with THAT which fills the breasts of millions of sinners with unspeakable admiration and joy. *For the great love wherewith he loved us, he spared not his own Son, but delivered him up unto death for our sakes; that we might not perish, but have everlasting life^t.* Think of this, Christians, believe it, feel the blessings which result from it; and be unmerciful if you can — You cannot. For *he who is thus rich in mercy hath quickened you, when ye were dead in trespasses and sins^w:* and this temper — these duties I have been recommending are the natural, the spontaneous acts of that new life ye now live. *Ye are followers of the merciful God, as dear children^v;* and are conformed to the image of his Son, who is full of grace and truth^x. — It remains now that I briefly enumerate those duties which fall under the idea,

^t Rom. viii. 32. John iii. 16.

^u Eph. ii. 4, 5.

^w Eph. v. 1.

^x Rom. viii. 29. John i. 14.

3. Of *Love*. And these are of the most exalted nature, and of the strongest obligation. For the objects of this species of goodness have something farther to recommend them to our regard, besides the consideration of want or misery. Not to speak here of such whose amiable qualities of a natural kind can scarcely fail of attracting our regards : there are those who stand intitled to our cordial affection and confidence, as possessing the nobler gifts of virtue and religion. These having the image of the blessed God enstamped upon them, and being the real friends and brethren of Christ, are the excellent of the earth. Besides therefore the respects which are due to them in common with the rest of our fellow-creatures, and on account of the afflictions they may happen to endure ; it is our unquestionable duty to esteem and honour them, to embrace them in the arms of cordial friendship and love, to associate with them, to pray daily for them, and to make a point of it to promote their interests, both civil and religious, in every way we are able. Are they happy ? We are to rejoice with them. Are they in distress ? We are to sympathize with them. Are they in want ? We are to relieve them.

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Are they in danger? We are to protect them. To our counsel assistance and support they above all others stand intitled. But it were endless to enumerate the various offices which Christian love and friendship demand. It may however be proper here to throw out some general hints, for the regulating our acts of charity and benevolence —

They should be as extensive as possible. It is unworthy of a Christian to confine his regards to those good men only, who are exactly of the same opinion or denomination with himself. And it is a reflection on his prudence, to be so unreasonably liberal to a few, as to put it out of his power to assist others. — Yet justice as well as charity require, that our family, our acquaintance, and those of the same community, should take place of strangers, though in point of character they are all equally deserving. — A regard should be had also to the particular exigencies of our Christian brethren; the greatest and most pressing having clearly the first and largest claim to our assistance. — Nor should we forget their stations abilities and usefulness, since the proportioning our liberality by this rule, is not only in itself reasonable, but tends greatly to extend its utility. — Much there is likewise in a

kind obliging and affable manner of conferring favors on those we love : for hereby their value and acceptableness are not a little heightened and increased. — But what should above all be most regarded, is the principle by which we are actuated in these various duties. A sincere desire to please God, to express our love to Christ, and to do our brother real good, should be the governing motive of our conduct.

And now can it be questioned whether these are the natural and proper fruits of religion ? The character of the blessed God, who is never weary of doing good ; the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath enriched us at the expence of the deepest poverty ; the reasonings and persuasions of the bible ; and the examples of the wisest best and happiest men ; all proclaim aloud our obligations to these great duties. Nor is there a Christian living, whose heart is impressed with that love which passeth knowledge, and who recollects the refined pleasure he has often felt in doing good, but will with all the powers of his soul echo back his loud Amen.

Thus have we considered the duties which are required of us towards one another, and which are to be practised by us in the se-

veral relations wherein Providence hath placed us. And now, What think we of them ? How stand we disposed to them ? And what is the general tenor of our conduct ? Is it our aim *to do justice, to love mercy, and to follow peace with all men ?* And amidst all, *Do we walk humbly with God?** blushing at our innumerable imperfections, in the presence of that infinitely holy Being ; and placing all our hope of acceptance with him, on the mediation sacrifice and righteousness of the great Emmanuel. Is this I say our temper ? And under the influence of these principles, is it our concern to live and act ? — Then are we Christians indeed.

* Micah vi. 8.

DISCOURSE VIII.

PART III.

WE have seen what are the proper expressions of religion towards God, and towards our neighbour. It remains that we consider,

III. The several duties we owe to Ourselves.

Now these duties, which I propose briefly to enumerate and explain, result from our natural frame and constitution, as consisting of soul and body; from the connection of these two constituent parts of man with each other; and from our relation to the present state, and to that which will succeed it in the world to come. Wherefore two things are necessary in order to our having a clear idea of these duties, and in order to the proper discharge of them. The one is

— *A due*

— *A due knowledge of ourselves.* And the other — *A right judgment of our true interests.* Each of these the real Christian possesses. The grace of God leads him into an acquaintance with himself, shews him wherein his happiness consists, and fixes upon his heart a lively sense of the vast importance of his future and everlasting concerns. Yet these are matters in which the best of us are but imperfectly versed. A care therefore to improve herein, may be considered as a primary duty, and indeed as a necessary mean, to those other duties of which I am presently to discourse. For this reason it will be proper to touch briefly upon each of these points, before we proceed to what we have chiefly in view.

i. *As to the knowledge of ourselves.*

When I say *ourselves*, I mean human nature in general, and each one of us his own state and character in particular. — It should be our concern to know *in general* what man is, as consisting of soul and body; what are his several powers duties interests and ends of existence: what he once was, when he first came out of the hands of his Creator; and what he now is,

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in his present fallen and depraved condition: what are the means provided for his recovery from these sad circumstances: what is his proper business during his short continuance in this life; and what are his prospects as to a future world.—And then as to ourselves *individually*; it should be our concern to know, not the state of our bodies or of our animal nature only, but of our minds. And here the object should be, not merely to come at a just idea of the strength degree and extent of our intellectual powers, or of the taste complexion and bent of our natural tempers (the knowledge of which hath undoubtedly its use) but chiefly to get a clear view of the true state of our hearts, what are our prevailing inclinations and tendencies, and what our governing principles and motives of conduct.

Now this knowledge is most interesting and important. Our welfare and usefulness depend upon it. It is necessary to religion: it is one main part of it. Nay without a competent measure of self-knowledge, we cannot perform aright many of the duties we owe to ourselves, as hath been already observed. Its utility was judged

to be so great even by the heathens themselves, that the precept, *Know thyself*, was said to come down from the Gods. And I hardly need tell you how earnestly the sacred scriptures recommend it; exhorting us to take heed to our spirits, to commune with our own hearts, and to search try and examine ourselves.

But it is perhaps of all others one of the most difficult parts of knowledge; and that on account both of its prodigious extent, and the great variety of obstructions which lie in the way of acquiring it. It comprehends in it innumerable particulars; for it hath respect to all the thoughts counsels reasonings purposes and affections of the heart, which are amazingly subtle quick complicated and various in their operation. They who are not acquainted with the construction of the human body, would hardly imagine what intricacies there are in that particular branch of science to try the ingenuity of the anatomist. But the mechanism of the soul is far more curious and diversified than that of the body; and of consequence, as the vitiated state of the one is more dangerous and obstinate of cure than the other, so the right understanding of the distempers of the heart, is attended

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with peculiar and almost unsurmountable difficulties. It were endless to recite them. We are so indisposed, through various causes, to the study of ourselves; we are possessed with such strong prejudices in our own favor; and external objects have so powerful an influence to divert our attention from this important subject; that we may well complain with the psalmist, *Who can understand his errors?*^x and with the prophet, *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, who can know it?*^z

Now as this is the case, the utmost skill resolution and diligence are necessary in order, with divine assistance, to our making any progress in the knowledge of ourselves. It behoves us carefully to watch the motions of our hearts, to consider well their complexion spirit and tendency, to compare them with the dictates of reason conscience and the word of God, and to pass impartial sentence upon them. We should endeavour frequently to rouse ourselves from that slothful state into which we are apt to degenerate. We should ensure ourselves to a habit of reflection and consideration. We should strive to divert ourselves of all predilections or prejudices

in our own favor. We should be willing rather to endure those censures which may be the result of a strict examination of the heart, than to enjoy the sweets of a self-complacency which is the fruit of miserable ignorance and self-deception. We should at certain seasons withdraw from the world in order to converse with ourselves, and make our reading, our social communications, and our attendance on public worship, all in some way or other bend to this point. And in a word, it should be our prayer, as it was the psalmist's, to the great Father of lights, *Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts. And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*

But there is another prerequisite to the right discharge of the duties we owe to ourselves; and that is,

2. The forming a just estimate of our interests.

This indeed is the result of self-knowledge, always accompanies it, and lies, together with that, at the very foundation of

* Psalm cxxxix. 23, 24.

the experience and practice of religion. For what religion can there be in the heart of that man, who is a stranger to himself, and has no sense wherein his true honor importance and happiness consist? Now the soul is our nobler part, and therefore demands our first and principal attention and care. It is the chief seat of pleasure and pain; and of consequence, if it is in an unhealthful state, whatever may be our outward circumstances, we must needs upon the whole be miserable. But what is it that is necessary to the well-being of the soul? It is the orderly subjection of the passions and appetites of nature to the dictates of right reason, and the regular enjoyment of peace of conscience, a sense of God's favor, and a cheerful hope of eternal life. This account of the matter is so plain and obvious, that few will venture to deny it. But alas! there are few only who have such a deep conviction of it, as to produce any considerable effect in their temper and conduct. Here we fail, even those of us who are in the main set right as to this grand leading point: that is to say, though our best interest is our governing end, yet our attention is too frequently diverted from it by the undue influence of external objects,

objects. And hence proceed all those defects we so much lament, in regard of the duties we owe to ourselves. Did we steadily keep in view our real happiness, the practice of those duties would daily become more and more easy cheerful and habitual. The labouring therefore to fix on our hearts this estimate of our true interest, is what I am here recommending as previously necessary to what is to follow.

To this end it is of great importance that we avail ourselves of all the observation we make on what happens around us, and of all our experience of the comfort and utility of religion, by applying such observation and experience to the great purpose of confirming our practical judgment in favor of the chief good, preferably to every other emolument or advantage besides. The enjoyments of the present life are not indeed to be treated with cynical indifference and contempt: but, since we are apt to over-rate them, their allays and imperfections, and their criminal and hurtful tendency too, when immoderately pursued, ought frequently and seriously to be considered.

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And here we shall be assisted by innumerable facts which continually occur, and which clearly prove the vanity of the world: such as, the weariness and disgust which accompany sensual gratifications — the pains and disorders of animal nature — the accidental calamities to which we are every moment liable — the rapid progress of time — the change that passes among every thing around us — and the triumphs of death, in various forms, over each individual of the human race. The adverting frequently to these facts, would have a happy effect to lessen our opinion of the value and importance of sublunary things; and so to regulate our conduct towards them. And is not this a piece of justice we owe to ourselves, and which cannot be withheld without a manifest injury to our real interests? Why should we ignominiously suffer ourselves to be imposed upon by appearances? Will the little feeble present pleasure which arises from such wilful imposition, compensate the pain and misery which we may be assured the disappointment will by and by occasion?

In order yet farther to establish our judgment in favor of the chief good, we ought to consider also those facts which prove the

infinite excellence and importance of spiritual and divine things. And what facts can do this in a more clear striking and convincing manner, than those held up to our view in the gospel, and those respecting the powers and pleasures of religion which stand attested by our own experience? Who that beholds the Son of God tabernacling among men, expiring on a cross, rising from the dead, and ascending up into heaven — Who that considers the provision he has hereby made for our pardon justification and final happiness — Who that realizes the last judgment, the miseries of the damned, and the triumphs of the blessed — I will add, Who that reflects on what has passed in his own mind, whence he has learned the value of his soul, and the desirableness of inward peace hope and joy — but must perceive an infinite importance in the great concerns of religion — an importance which exceeds all human measures, and which makes the most interesting affairs of the present life appear little trifling and inconsiderable? Such effect had these great considerations upon the apostle, when he cried out, *God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ*

Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world^b.

Thus have we taken a general view of these two great points — *The knowledge of ourselves* — And *a right judgment of our interest*; which are the grounds of the duties we owe to ourselves: which duties we now proceed to consider.

Here I might distinctly enlarge on all the affections and appetites of nature, the right government of which is of great importance to our real welfare. But this, I am sensible, is a subject too copious to be particularly discussed at present; I shall therefore confine myself to the duties of *Humility* — *Contentment* — and *Temperance*, which are comprehended in the general idea of *Sobriety*, and which may be very properly described as duties we owe to ourselves, since they chiefly respect matters wherein our interest and happiness, as to the things of the present life, are more immediately concerned. *Humility* stands opposed to *Pride*, which hath for its object honor; *Contentment* to *Avarice*, which hath for its object wealth; and *Temperance* stands opposed to *Sensuality*, which hath for its object pleasure. To these heads the

^b Gal. vi. 14.

apostle

apostle John refers us, when warning us against voluptuousness covetousness and ambition, he speaks of all that is in the world under the notion of *the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life*. — Let us begin,

FIRST With *Humility*.

To be humble is to think soberly of ourselves, as the apostle happily expresses it^c, and to demean ourselves accordingly. Now this temper is distinguishable both from pusillanimity and affectation. Some few there are who frame too mean and low an idea both of their natural abilities and their religious attainments. And the effect is, an unreasonable bashfulness and dejection of countenance, and a timid irresolute deportment. But surely it can never be a man's duty to think otherwise of himself than he really is, or of his condition than the fact requires. For this, instead of thinking soberly, would be thinking untruly, and so humility would be founded in falsehood. — There are others also, which is the more common case, who affect to think contemptibly of themselves, whilst in truth

^c 1 John ii. 16.

^d Rom. xii. 3.

they

they have a very high opinion of their own worth. This is what our Saviour so much condemned in the Pharisees of old: and it is the very worst species of pride, for it involves in it dissimulation and hypocrisy, and is a prostitution of a most amiable virtue to the base purpose of gratifying an insolent vice. But in these instances, the appearance of humility is for the most part so awkwardly assumed, that the veil is easily seen through, and so it defeats its own intention.

But true humility is such a temper, as is the natural result of a fair and impartial judgment of ourselves, our characters and circumstances. He who thinks soberly, that is, truly of himself, cannot fail to be a humble man; because, whatever good qualities he may possess, he will see reason to estimate them at a much lower rate than they stand in the opinion of those around him, as he is himself sensible of many corrupt mixtures which others candidly overlook. Pride is founded in ignorance, wilful ignorance. Men take themselves to be what they really are not, and so are vain and self-confident; and the effect appears in their countenances conversation and deportment. But the reverse

is the character of the truly humble man. Knowing himself, he is cautious how he attributes that to himself which doth not belong to him, how he over-rates the good he possesses, and how he undertakes what he is not equal to. Deeply impressed also with a sense of his own numerous follies and sins, he is of a lowly and contrite mind, or, as our Saviour describes him, *poor in spirit*. Nor can he avoid expressing these tempers in an unaffected modesty of countenance language and behaviour. *He puts on bumbleness of mind*. — But in order more clearly to understand this amiable grace and the several duties of it, it will be proper to consider ourselves in a relative view. For it is by comparing ourselves with God and one another, that our humility is brought to the test; and it is in our mutual intercourses, that the fruits of it are chiefly discernible. Now,

1. As to God. When the Christian sets himself in the immediate presence of that infinitely great wise holy and perfect Being, how little ignorant and contemptible does he appear in his own eyes? Awfully struck

• Matth. v. 3: ^f Col. iii. 12. τατεινοπασίν, *lowliness of mind*, a virtue which, as some have remarked, was scarcely known so much as by name to heathen writers.

with the majesty and glory of God, he loses sight of his own importance, and acknowledges that he is less than nothing and vanity. Surrounded with the splendors of divine omniscience, his highest attainments in knowledge seem to him but as the dim light of a candle, amidst the resplendent brightness of the sun. And over-powered with a sense of the infinite purity rectitude and goodness of God, he is abashed and confounded at his own baseness, vileness and wretchedness. In this temper he approaches God, or however wishes always to approach him, saying with Jacob, *I am not worthy, O Lord, of the least of all thy mercies*^s; with Job, *I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes*^t; with Isaiah, *Wo is me, I am a man of unclean lips*^u; and with the Publican in the parable, *God be merciful to me a sinner*^v.

This temper expresses itself in his reasonings about God, checking that vain curiosity, that presumptuous forwardness, and that bold positivity, with which men are too apt to treat divine truths. In his ready subjection to the commands of God, each of which, convinced of the authority

^s Gen. xxxii. 10. ^t Job xlii. 6. ^u Isa. vi. 5.

^v Luke xviii. 13.

that enjoins them, he reverently acknowledges to be wise just and good. In his submission to the providences of God, which, however adverse and afflictive, he dares not censure or condemn, but approves and justifies. And more especially is it expressed in his cheerful and cordial reception of the gospel, which, as it brings us glad tidings of great joy, so holds up truths to our view extremely mortifying to the natural pride and vanity of the human heart. He thankfully accepts salvation at the hands of divine mercy, as the fruit of the mediation sacrifice and righteousness of Christ; and he humbly relies on the promised influence of the Holy Spirit, for that instruction assistance and support which he finds his present circumstances manifestly require.

2. As to our fellow-creatures. Comparison of ourselves with others, will prove a farther occasion of trying our humility, and, if we are really possessed of it, will draw forth many genuine expressions of this excellent temper. The apostle exhorts us, *in lowliness of mind, to esteem others better than ourselves*¹. Not that we are in all cases indiscriminately to give the

¹ Philip. ii. 3.

preference to others, for that would be acting contrary to the truth, which surely can never be a man's duty. But the meaning is, that we should rather be partial to the good qualities of others than to our own, and that in our deportment we should err rather on the side of modesty than forwardness.

In regard of *natural endowments* whether of body or mind, such as beauty, understanding and the like; a humble man will remember to whom he is indebted for these advantages, that it is God who hath made him to differ from others, and that what he hath he has received. Sensible of his propensity to self-complacency, he will not only be cautious how he advertises too frequently to these endowments, unless it be with a view to check immoderate bashfulness, or to excite thankfulness to God; but he will be disposed to contemplate the same accomplishments in others, in order to restrain and suppress his own natural vanity. So far will he be from feeling envy and ill-will excited by such comparison, the usual effects of which are calumny and detraction; that he will admire their virtues and with pleasure commend them: and at the same time, conscious of his own blemishes and imperfections,

imperfections, he will carry it modestly candidly and affably towards all men.

In like manner as to our *civil connections*, or the station of life we fill. True humility will teach a man not to value himself on account of the riches or honors he possesses, and so treat those in inferior circumstances with supercilious haughtiness and contempt: for he will remember that these distinctions are of trifling account in themselves, of no importance when put in the balance with real goodness, and that they will all cease at death. Reflecting therefore, that *God hath made of one blood all nations of men that dwell on the face of the earth^m*; he will be ready courteously to perform every office of kindness to the meanest of his fellow-creatures, and *to descend to men of low estateⁿ*. And on the other hand, this temper will incline those, whom Providence hath placed in lower stations, to demean themselves with all becoming modesty and decency, laying a restraint on the first risings of restless ambition, and disposing them cheerfully to give honor to whom honor is due.

To which it must be added, that in regard of his *religious attainments*, the Christian will give striking proofs of his humi-

^m Acts xviii. 26.

ⁿ Rom. xii. 16.

ility in his behaviour towards both good and bad men. As to the latter, we shall not see him with an air of self-complacency exulting over them, like the proud Pharisee, who when he said, *God I thank thee that I am not as this Publican*^{*}, meant rather to offer incense to his own vanity than sincere praise to God. But we shall hear him expressing a tender compassion for his fellow-sinners, amidst all their guilt and misery; while, with a deep sense of his own unworthiness and unfeigned gratitude to Heaven, he cheerfully admits that it is *by the grace of God he is what he is*. Nor will he countenance in his breast a mean or disrespectful idea of any of his fellow-Christians, however inferior to him in spiritual gifts or other nobler attainments. So far from it that, like the apostle, he will be ready to acknowledge on all proper occasions, that he is *less than the least of all saints*[†]. An acknowledgment this which, however at first view it may scarcely seem reconcileable with sincerity, yet falls very naturally from his lips, who is deeply versed in the knowledge of himself, and totally unpractised in the malevolent art of judging others. — Such are the outlines of that humble temper, which distinguishes the

* Luke xviii. 11. † 1 Cor. xv. 10. [¶] Eph. iii. 8.

character

character of the real Christian from that of other men, and is the first and chiefest expression of true and genuine religion.

And now it were easy to shew you our obligations to this amiable temper and conduct. The humble Christian is a character which fails not to strike every beholder with reverence and pleasure. Yet alas! how few are there who answer to that description! Men are naturally vain proud and self-sufficient. Divine grace therefore it is that subdues their haughty spirits, lays them at the feet of mercy, and moulds them into a meek lowly contrite disposition: and this it does by leading them into an acquaintance with God and and their own hearts. Here I might shew you how admirably the gospel is adapted to excite cherish and promote this temper; so that he who is a stranger to it, hath never entered into the spirit of the gospel, or felt its power on his heart — I might shew you what peculiar marks of honor the scripture puts upon the humble man — the peace and pleasure which accompany the exercise of this grace and its usefulness to society — the striking examples of humility set before us in the bible, and especially that of our Lord Jesus, who

being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself; and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross¹. — And, in a word, I might tell you of the many great blessings promised to the humble Christian, not in this life only, but in that to come. *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*². But I forbear — From humility let us go on,

SECONDLY To Contentment, which is the offspring of humility, and another branch of duty we owe to ourselves.

By contentment I mean a cheerful acquiescence in the will of Providence respecting our outward or worldly circumstances. *Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have*³. And the apostle tells us, as to himself, that he had learned in whatsoever state he was therewith to be content⁴. Now

¹ Philip. ii. 6, 7, 8.

² Matth. v. 3. ³ Heb. xiii. 5.

⁴ Philip. iv. 11.

this temper is very distinguishable from that insensibility, or, to say the best of it, that easiness of disposition which is the mere effect of natural constitution. One man may be so framed, as to be less susceptible of impressions from external objects than another; and of consequence may seem to be of a contented mind, while he is a stranger to those reasonings, which enter into the spirit of this divine grace. The behaviour, however, of such a person will be different from that of the real Christian, and the difference may, I think, be pretty easily discerned by a sensible observer. — It is also farther to be premised, that contentment does by no means forbid the proper use of all lawful measures to improve our condition in life. For if this were the case, it would cut the sinews of industry, and extinguish some of the most useful principles to society which Providence hath implanted in the human breast. A man's diligence therefore in the management of his secular concerns, is no argument of his being defective in the duty I am recommending.

But, true Christian contentment stands opposed to avarice. Now as the chief expressions of an avaritious temper, are dis-

quietude and anxiety, an eager and restless pursuit of the world, envy and ill-will, and a secret murmuring at the ways of Providence; so the opposite qualities are the proper characteristics of a contented mind. To dwell on each of these particulars would carry me too far: it shall suffice therefore in a few words to contrast the two characters.

The discontented man is ever restless and uneasy, dissatisfied with his station in life, his connections, and almost every circumstance that happens to him. He is continually peevish and fretful, impatient of every injury he receives, and unduly depressed with every disappointment he suffers. He considers most other persons as happier than himself, and enjoys hardly any of the blessings of Providence with a calm and grateful mind. He is *careful and troubled about many things*, anxious for to-morrow, what he shall eat, what he shall drink, and wherewithal he shall be cloathed*. He forms to himself a thousand distressing fears concerning futurity, and makes his present condition unhappy, by anticipating the miseries he may possibly endure years to come.

His eager and passionate fondness for the

* Luke x. 41.

Matth. vi. 31.

world hurries him into the most dangerous pursuits; and sometimes tempts him beyond the limits of truth and honesty. *He seeks great things for himself*, and resolving at all events to be rich, he falls into temptation and a snare, and into foolish and hurtful lusts, which pierce him through with many sorrows, and in the end drown him in destruction and perdition². While he forgets the miseries of those beneath him, he is envious of the honor and happiness of those above him. And, in a word, he is ever pertinaciously murmuring at the divine proceedings, and ever arrogantly arraigning the wisdom equity and goodness of Providence at his own partial tribunal. — Such is the character of the discontented man.

On the contrary, the contented Christian is calm and composed, well satisfied with the lot assigned him, or at least disposed, by the inconveniences attending it what they may, to make the best of his condition. With Agur he prays, *Give me neither poverty nor riches, but feed me with food convenient for me*³. And when offers of worldly greatness are made him that seem unnatural, and may prove dangerous to his best interests, he replies with the

¹ Jer. xlvi. 5. ² Tim. vi. 9, 10. ³ Prov. xxx. 8.

Shunammite, *I dwell among mine own people.* Having learned that the happiness of life consists not in the abundance a man hath, that all terrene enjoyments are uncertain and transitory, and that nothing short of the favor of God can give the mind true content; he does not eagerly pursue the profits and emoluments of the world, much less is he capable of purchasing them at the expence of honor and conscience. He remembers that *the little and righteous man hath, is better than all the treasures of the wicked;* and that *a good man shall be satisfied from himself.* While he prudently provides for futurity, he is not anxious about the event; but leaving the issue with Providence, he persuades himself that all will be well. He indulges not an envious disposition; but rather rejoices in the prosperity of others; and instead of making himself unhappy by unduly resenting injuries done him; he patiently endures them, and meekly forgives them. He eyes the hand of God in his afflictions, and so he dares not quarrel with that great Being, but quietly submits, saying with Eli, *It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth*

^b 2 Kings iv. 13.

^c Ps. xxxvii. 16.

^d Prov. xiv. 14.

him.

him good. Nay the weight of his troubles he lessens, by reflecting how much greater it might, and most certainly would have been, had God dealt with him according to his deserts. In short, he opposes his mercies to his afflictions, his joys to his sorrows, and his condition, however mean, to that of those who are in more distressing circumstances than himself; and so upon the whole, with a cheerful spirit, he acknowledges that he is highly indebted to the favor and goodness of Heaven—

“ What a vain thing, says he, is the world with all its enjoyments! Of what importance will it be to me a few months or years hence, whether I was rich or poor, applauded or despised? My great object is to pass through life quietly and usefully. Let others contend for crowns and kingdoms, for treasures and possessions: they are but trifles, yea the whole world is nothing to me, in comparison with my immortal soul. I rest satisfied with the allotments of Providence. What God does is right and well. I chuse that things should be as he would have them; for he knows better what is fit for me, than I know myself. A thousand mer-

"cies have fallen to my share which others
"have been denied. For these I am
"thankful. What I covet above all things
"is the favor of God, a sense of it impres-
"sed upon my heart, and a perfect con-
"formity of temper to the divine will.
"May I but be allowed to converse with
"the King of Kings, I can be content to
"be a peasant. Nay I can patiently en-
"dure the frowns of the whole world, if I
"may but enjoy the smiles of a reconciled
"God." Such are the reasonings of the
contented mind.

Now the duties of contentment, as well
as those of humility, are *fruits of holiness*,
the genuine product of true religion. The
grace of God subdues our rebellious hearts;
and so the various arguments which the
light of nature and the gospel of Christ
suggest to persuade us to a cheerful acqui-
escence in the divine will, being duly at-
tended to, have their proper and natural
effect. These arguments are too numerous
to be particularly considered here, or I
might remind you of the doctrine of pro-
vidence, the relations that subsist among
mankind, that subordination which is ne-
cessary to the well-being of society, the
unavoidable

unavoidable imperfections of the present state, the comforts as well as miseries which attend every condition of life, the shortness and uncertainty of our continuance here, and the painfulness and unavailability of discontent. And to these considerations I might add the more clear and glorious discoveries of divine revelation, the character therein given us of the Blessed God, the uncontrouled authority which the Lord Jesus Christ is represented as exercising over the kingdom of providence, his special concern for the welfare of his faithful people, the many promises respecting our temporal interests, the striking examples of contentment held up to our view, the rich comforts of religion, and in a word, the bright prospects of a future and eternal world. Who that believes these great truths, enters into the spirit of them, and frequently contemplates them, but must from thence learn, with the apostle, *in whatever state he is therewith to be content?* Say, Christian, have you not felt their influence to soothe your ruffled passions, and to diffuse tranquillity and cheerfulness through your soul? Such then is the effect of true religion. — And he who is thus instructed in

in the duties of contentment, will also find himself disposed,

THIRDLY To those of Temperance.

By Temperance is meant the due regulation of our bodily appetites, or a moderate use of those enjoyments which are peculiar to animal nature. As to gross acts of sensuality, or direct violations of the laws of chastity and sobriety, they are so generally acknowledged to be criminal, (though alas! too frequently practised) that I need not dwell upon them. Few will dare to be open advocates for such indulgences, since it is agreed on all hands, that they are the sources of innumerable mischiefs to the persons substance and reputation of individuals, and to the peace safety and good order of society. There can be no doubt therefore, that it will be the concern of every real Christian to maintain a virtuous character in the view of all around him; and their pretensions to religion, be they who they may, are most certainly vain, who can dare allow themselves to break through the fences, which the laws of God and men have established against vice and immorality. No! *The grace of God that brings*

eth

eth salvation, teacheth us that, denying the lusts of the flesh, we should live soberly in this present world.

But what I have chiefly in view, is to explain those duties of temperance whereby we may not only be held back from the criminal excesses just mentioned, but from all such approaches to them as are offensive to God and hurtful to our real interests. And here it should be observed in general, that the moderate gratification of our appetites is by no means sinful. For if it were, to what end were they given us? It can be no harm to eat when we are hungry, or to drink when we are thirsty. The evil lies in excess. And since we are prone, through the pleasure which results from the gratification of our appetites, to allow them too great a scope, it is our duty to consider the proper ends for which they were implanted in our nature, to set such bounds to them as reason directs, and in some instances absolutely to deny them, even though the indulgence of them may not be strictly criminal. Such a treatment of ourselves, under certain circumstances, may be very expedient, in order to hold the body in subjection to the soul, and to secure -
-gined and Tit. ii. 72. many will be viles
-dys. our

our nobler part from a slavery which is as base and dishonourable, as it is injurious and sinful.

As to what respects *Chastity*. We are not only to abstain from unlawful connections, and, as the apostle expresses it, *to possess each one his vessel in sanctification and honor*; but carefully to avoid all those indecent liberties of conversation, reading and deportment, which have a manifest tendency to inflame the passions, and which are too well known to need be mentioned. We are to suppress impure thoughts at their first rising, to keep a guard upon our imagination and senses, *to make a covenant with our eyes*^b, to lay aside all *flirtiness, foolish talking and jesting*, which are not convenient, and to pray earnestly to God *to create in us clean hearts*^c.

And then as to that branch of temperance which respects our food. We are not only to abstain from those abominable excesses of *surfeiting and drunkenness*^d, which totally deprive men of their reason, and degrade them to the rank of brutes; but from all immoderate use of meats and drinks. And here, the rules to direct our conduct are so

^a 1 Thes. iv. 3, 4. ^b Job xxxi. 1. ^c 1 Cor. x. 3. ^d Eph. v. 4.
Psal. li. 10. ^e Luke xxi. 34.

plain and easy, that they can scarce be mistaken. That doubtless may be deemed an abuse of the blessings of providence which hath an effect, in any degree, to injure our health, to cloud our understandings, or to unfit us for the duties of life. When we thus transgress the bounds of moderation, our table becomes a snare to us; and, for the sake of a little present gratification, we entail disorders on our constitution, defraud the poor of their right, and put it out of our power to render those services to God and man which our station demands. But regard is to be had to our *circumstances*, as well as to the health of our bodies and minds. Extravagance is not to be justified in any: there is however a kind of plenty and elegance which well becomes the tables of those of superior rank, and which either to imitate or condemn argues equal vanity in those beneath them. But it requires no pains to prove that that is intemperance, be the motive to it what it may, whether pride or luxury, which hurries persons into expences they cannot answer; or ties up their hands from those acts of liberality, to which their fellow-creatures have an unquestionable title. Nor should I forget to observe, that sobriety sets limits also to the

time we spend in avocations of this nature. For though we are not guilty of excess in either of the instances just mentioned, yet if we idly squander away hours in the gratifications of animal nature, the duties both of civil and religious life must be neglected, or at least considerably hindered and curtailed. — And now these rules, as to the use of meats and drinks, may for the most part be applied to all our other sensual or worldly enjoyments.

The duties of Temperance thus briefly explained approve themselves, I make no doubt, to every man's reason and conscience. Yet, so violent are the appetites of depraved nature, that multitudes are not to be deterred, even by the laws of their country, from the open indulgence of them. And as to those whose general deportment is decent and sober, there are but few, it is to be feared, whose conduct is influenced by any higher motive than that of a regard to their health reputation or worldly interests. It is the grace of God therefore, and that only, which effectually emancipates the immortal mind from the cruel thraldom of bodily appetites. And this it does, by setting the divine Being in all his infinite perfections before our eyes,

eyes, by convincing us of the superior value and excellence of the soul to the body, by giving us a taste of the refined pleasures of communion with Heaven, and by fixing upon our hearts a lively impression of the important realities of a future state. And as divine grace thus puts the government of our appetites, as well as our other passions, into the hands of enlightened reason; so the gospel supplies arguments peculiar to itself to persuade us to these duties of chastity and sobriety. As particularly, God's own Son having been made flesh and dwelt among us^m; his having bought us with the price of his own blood; joined us to himself, and made our bodies his membersⁿ; as also the inhabitation of the Spirit, for our bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost^o; and the resurrection of the body at the last day. They therefore who are Christ's must crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts^p. And if any man bath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his^q.

Thus have we considered the several duties we owe to God — to one another — and to ourselves, which are all comprehended

^m John i. 14.

ⁿ 1 Cor. vi. 30. xvii. 15.

^o Ver. 19.

^p Gal. v. 24.

^q Rom. viii. 9.

in the general phrase in our text of *the fruits of holiness*. *This must be itself wod; and has so* And now it remains that I close the whole with two or three reflections, which, however important, the length of this discourse will but just allow me to mention. — We hence see the infinite excellence and utility of true religion. For if the duties that have been described are of such consequence to the comfort and usefulness of individuals, and to the general welfare and happiness of society; that surely is most worthy of our attention and regard which sets these duties in their true light, and furnishes us with the noblest motives to urge us to them, and the only effectual aids to enable us to perform them in a right manner. — By this extensive view we have taken of *the fruits of holiness* we are also naturally led into an examination of ourselves, whether we are Christians indeed, what is the general tenor of our conduct, and by what motives we are influenced. *By their fruits, says our Saviour, ye shall know them*. — And since those who, as the apostle expresses it in this context, *have from their heart obeyed that form of doctrine which was delivered unto them*, are never-

* Matth. vii. 20.

theleſs deeply ſenſible of innumerable follies and fins; how ſhall we ſufficiently admire and adore that grace, which has made ſo free and ample a provision for our final acceptance and ſalvation in Jesus Christ! Thus hath the Bleſſed God, of his infinite mercy, effectually relieved us of thoſe distressing fears which would have muſterably perplexed and impeded us in the path of duty; and at the ſame time, as effectually ſecured to himſelf alone the glory of our everlasting ſalvation. But of theſe things we ſhall have occaſion to diſcourse hereafter.

END of the FIRST VOLUME.

baseball END of the FIRST VOLUME. *baseball*

221 *and "The Great War"*

7
I am now in the middle of the day, and the sun is high in the sky. The air is warm and humid, with a slight breeze from the west. I am walking along a path through a dense forest of tall trees, their leaves rustling in the wind. The ground is covered in fallen leaves and pine needles. In the distance, I can see a small stream flowing through the trees. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and serene.

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